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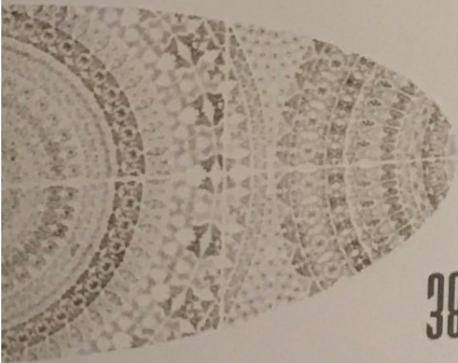
Exhibition Reviews

Photo Essay

Collector

Book Review

# CONTENT



5

EDITORS' NOTE

12

REVIEWS

44

ESSAY

Preliminary Notes for the Understanding of Historical Significance of Geometry in Arab/Islamic Thought, and its Suppressed Role in the Genealogy of World History

**Rasheed Araeen**

56

ART GLOBAL

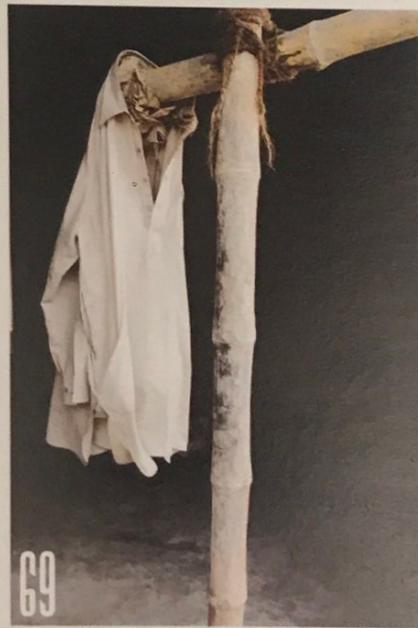
Looking South: Northern Scene

**Maureen Korp**

64

Jamelie Hassan:  
At the center of marginality

**Amra Ali**



69

## PHOTO ESSAY

Temporal Closets

**Ruqayya Rizwan**

76

## COLLECTOR

Passion to Obsession-

Ali Adil Khan

**Rumana Husain**

86

## BOOK REVIEW

... In Such Intolerant Times

*Adeeb, Funkaar aur Insani*

*Huqooq*

**Reviewed by Saqlain Zaidi**

90

## NUKTA-E-NAZAR

**Aasim Akhtar**

**Aasim Akhtar** is an artist, art critic and curator. His writing is published in magazines, catalogues, and books both nationally and internationally, and his artwork has been widely exhibited. In 2010 his work was displayed at the Whitechapel Gallery, London as part of a commemorative show entitled, 'Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh'. He is the author of three books, including, *Dialogues with Threads: Traditions of Embroidery in Hazara*. He teaches Art Appreciation at Fatima Jinnah Women University in Rawalpindi.

**Abdul Aziz Sohail** graduated with a BA in Art History from Brandeis University, Massachusetts. He is currently working as Assistant Manager of the Oral History Project of the Citizens Archive of Pakistan. With interest in art criticism, curating and business he also pursues independent projects focusing on contemporary art and culture of South Asia & the Middle East. He is especially interested in studying and promoting the modern and contemporary artistic tradition of Pakistan. In addition to *NuktaArt*, his writings have appeared in *Big, Red & Shiny*, a contemporary art magazine based in Boston and the *Huffington Post*.

**Dr. Maureen Korp** is an art historian and critic, poet, lecturer, and independent curator based in Ottawa, Canada. She has written three books, many scholarly articles, and is currently a contributing writer for *Guerilla*, the Canadian quarterly cultural journal, and *The Epoch Times*, an international newspaper published in 35 countries. Her best-known book, *Sacred Art of the Earth - Ancient and Contemporary Earthworks* (1997) remains in print. Dr. Korp has lectured at universities throughout Canada, the United States, Romania, and Asia on the historical interrelationship of art and religions. From 2008 - 2010, Dr. Korp was an associate professor of the History of Art, Architecture, and Design at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Ilona Yusuf** is a designer, poet and printmaker. She designs and executes lighting and conversation piece furniture under the label 'atelier ilona', utilizing techniques such as block, screen and lino printing, hand embroidery and decoupage. Her poems have been published in book form (*Picture This*, 2001) and thereafter in literary journals in Pakistan and abroad. She freelances for several magazines, writing on art and literature. Her artwork features collagraph prints and photopolymer etchings, which she also integrates with text to make artist's books. Her work can be viewed at [ilonayusuf.blogspot.com](http://ilonayusuf.blogspot.com)

**Madiha Sikander** was born in Hyderabad, Pakistan in 1987. She is a visual artist and writer based in Karachi. She graduated from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 2009 majoring in miniature painting. She was awarded a distinction for her thesis project 'Anonymous'. Her works have been exhibited nationally and internationally including shows in Paris,

Switzerland, USA, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Singapore. She has had a solo show 'Home is where...' at Koel Gallery, in September 2013. She was a part of the 11th Wasanii International Artist's Workshop at Kuona Trust, Kenya and Regional Workshop, Theertha in 2012. She has worked as co-coordinator at Vasl Artist's Collective, and as coordinator at Koel Gallery in Karachi.

**Maha Malik** is a freelance art writer based in Karachi. She has a background in contemporary English literature, and she currently teaches at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. Her Master's essay includes notations on magical realist fiction, 20th century autobiography, and phenomenology. Having returned to Pakistan after a decade in New York, she began working with crossovers between art history, visual culture, and literary aesthetics. Maha curated her first exhibition 'Intimacy', at Koel Gallery, Karachi in early 2013. She is currently working on a number of related projects.

**Rasheed Araeen** (b. 1935) is a London based conceptual artist, sculptor, painter, writer and curator. He graduated in civil engineering from the University of Karachi in 1962, and moved to London in 1964. In 1972, he founded and edited the journal *Black Phoenix*, which in 1989 was established as the *Third Text - Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*, which became one of the most significant journals to address issues of post-colonial histories and ethnicity. His significant publications include: *Making Myself Visible* (London: Kala Press, 1984), *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Kala Press, 1984), *Art Beyond Art: Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the 21st Century*, (Third Text Publications, London, 2010). His work housed in important international collections, including the Tate Britain.

**Saqilain Zaidi** teaches History of Film, History of Art, Civilization Studies and Urdu Literature in South Asian Cinema at the Department of Media Science at SZABIST, Karachi Campus. He follows an interdisciplinary approach in teaching and integrates Urdu, English and Persian literature with philosophy, art history and film history. He has studied filmmaking extensively on a full-time scholarship at Hoze Honari, Tehran in Iran.

**Shermeen Beg** graduated from the National College of Arts with a Bachelor's in Architecture before proceeding to the United States to complete a Master's in Architecture with a focus on digital media. She has worked in Pakistan and the US, practicing architecture and pursuing her fascination for graphic design; ranging from card designs to professional booklets. Over the years she has shared her passion for travel, history and architecture through teaching and she has also published several articles in local periodicals. Shermeen lives in Toronto where she is exploring the eclectic art that the city has to offer.

Shafi Aqeel who shared his ardor for art with thousands of readers through his column in *Jang*, the most widely circulated Urdu daily in Pakistan, passed away recently in Karachi after a prolonged illness. His legacy stands as a collective challenge to bring art critique in Urdu closer to the conversations in English. **NUKTAART** will be bringing translations of his work to its readers.

**NUKTAART** is privileged to carry the essay of Rasheed Araeen, a foremost art thinker of our time. In the text, titled *Preliminary Notes for the Understanding of Historical Significance of Geometry in Arab/Islamic Thought, and its Suppressed Role in the Genealogy of World History* he foregrounds the visual interpretation of the spirit of Islam through precise and infinite geometric formulas. According to him "Geometry in Islamic art thus represents a paradigm shift in the evolution of human thought, from the observation of things and their representation as they appear to the eye, to the creation of an art form whose sensuousness is the product of pure abstract thinking; giving thus the imagination enormous power to think but also unprecedented freedom to create".

A good number of Pakistani artists in the last decade have arrived on the shores of Canada and have begun to win prestigious prizes and participate in important exhibitions. In this issue, the Canadian Art scene is not only covered from the perspective of their entry into mainstream but also the larger context, with essays by Dr. Maureen Korp and Amra Ali, and reviews of exhibitions at the Pearson International Airport and the Royal Ontario Museum.

Maureen Korp in her essay *Looking South: Northern Scene* investigates the long term impact of "...the Crown's failure to uphold existing treaty rights and resolve outstanding indigenous territorial claims" and the State's inability to control extensive environmental damage by influential mining corporations. In her words, "...artists of Northern Scene addressed wider global matters: the importance of knowing the land's stories foremost; the importance of knowing, thereby, one's measured place in the world".

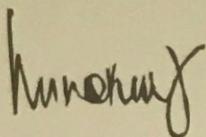
Amra Ali's essay *Jamelie Hassan: At the Center of Marginality* on Canadian born artist of Lebanese descent, Jamelie Hassan's recent Retrospective, of work from the present dating back to the 1980s, engages with the nature of ethnic histories and their relationship to the nature of representation of displacement in Canada.

Ali Adil Khan, the Collector featured in this issue, has been playing an instrumental role in making Canadian cultural institutions like the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and the Art Gallery of Mississauga receptive to art from South Asian Diaspora.

To document the current cultural crisis, The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan invited artists, writers and educators from all major cities of the country to present papers on emerging issues of conflict. Recently they were compiled in a publication which has been reviewed here by Saqlain Zaidi.

**NUKTAART** is showcasing images from the portfolio of Ruqayya Rizwan in its Photo Essay section. The emerging photographer is inspired by images that imply an exploratory narrative in mundane scenarios.

The *Nukta-e-Nazar* of this issue comes from Islamabad where art critic Aasim Akhtar is in conversation with participants of an Artists' Residency in China, critically examining the possibilities of cultural osmosis such an exchange has to offer.



Nilofur Farrukh  
Editor

Rumana Husain  
Amra Ali  
Senior Editors

December 2013

## ● ABDUL AZIZ SOHAIL



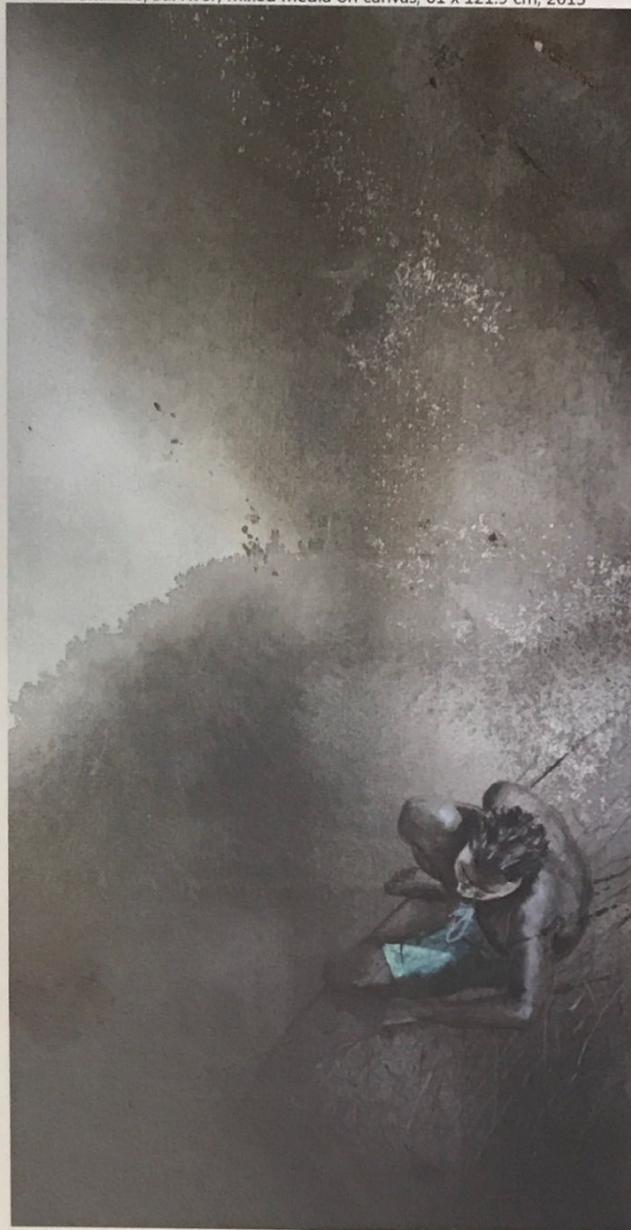
Hussain Chandio, *The Struggle*, mixed media on canvas, 91.4 x 91.4 cm, 2013

Exhibits of contemporary Pakistani art locally and globally have tended to focus largely on artists producing work in or based in the three major centers of production: Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. In light of this, the recently closed show at Unicorn Gallery, Karachi, 'Chandio, Depar, Mangi & Solangi' is especially significant because of its focus on artists based in Jamshoro, Sindh. In doing so, it dispels the mainstream views by shining a light on artistic production beyond these three cities; production that should be considered equally relevant to the larger narrative of Pakistani art.

The four artists in the exhibit are members of the faculty at the Center of Excellence in Art and Design MUET Jamshoro. A cursory look at the work showcases a high level of artistic talent and heightened sensitivity to local issues. Their unifying factor is their link to Sindhi culture and history that is expertly connected to contemporary anxieties. Two of the most powerful artists in the exhibit are Hussain Chandio - a painter whose recent work recalls the floods that have wrecked rural Pakistan in recent years, most significantly in 2011 and 2012, and Nusrat Raza Mangi - whose sculptures are directly influenced by contemporary social tensions, allowing his work to become a poignant commentary on issues of food, gender, justice and tradition.

As mentioned above, Hussain Chandio's paintings are inspired by and bring to the fore the devastating floods. They are dark and sweeping in monotone colors, and powerfully depict the sweeping ferocity of nature unleashed. The eye of the viewer is drawn to the central figures in the painting, which are minute in comparison to the natural forces present in the works, but claiming

Hussain Chandio, *Survivor*, mixed media on canvas, 61 x 121.9 cm, 2013



## JAMSHORO NARRATIVES

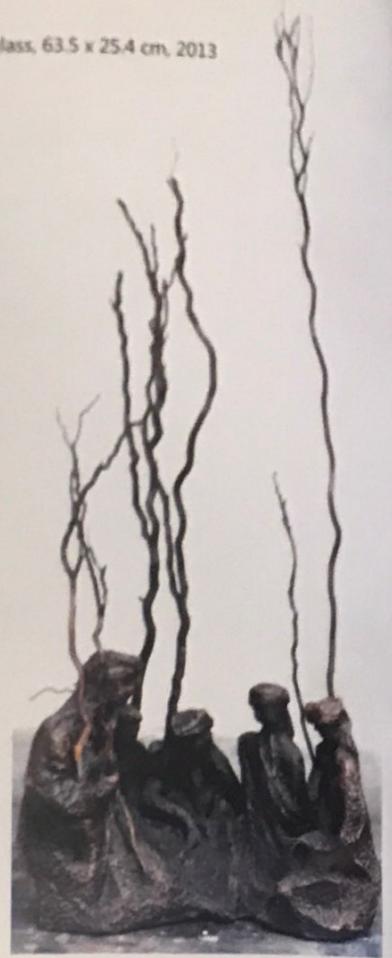
their space on the canvas, while fighting for survival. These figures, usually depicted on a seemingly drifting boat, or falling off it, recall ideas of helplessness evident in other works such as John Turner's 'The Slave Ship' or Frances Danby's 'The Deluge'. Those works, such as this, are not only a commentary on the limits of man's power against God, but also of the forgotten nature of these people. Turner, in *The Slave Ship* highlights the plight of dying slaves being thrown overboard by a trade ship, so as to avoid insurance payments. Through his poignant depiction of the suffering of the downtrodden, the artist inadvertently, also represents his outrage at the apathy of the powerful, a theme that

seems to run in Chandio's series. The minute figures really do seem alone, surrounded by overwhelming darkness. The decision of the artist to use one main color, in each work, be it green, purple, blue or brown, heightens the feelings of being constricted and trapped. The perspective of the viewer and the artist in the painting is from above and afar. It is as if, we, the viewers, are placed on a roof or heaven, suggesting our own privilege and silence. Is the artist discussing the silence of God in the face of such suffering, or really the silence of the masses against such large-scale human tragedies? In doing so, Chandio's artistic narrative is refreshing, one that is inclusive of the anxieties and tensions prevalent in Jamshoro, in urban and rural Pakistan beyond the cultural settings and problems of Lahore and Karachi. Terrorism and increasing religiosity, while very much relevant to these artists, does not seem to be the natural focus of their lives and art, rather it is concerns such as of hunger, floods, justice, erasure and regeneration of tradition, and gender violence that captivates their (and our) psyche.

Similar themes and concerns are dealt by Mangi in his sculptures. Two of his more prominent works *The Women* and *Jirga*, are an exquisite and complicated look at notions of justice, gender and tradition in Sindh and Pakistan. *Jirga* in particular, simple from afar, but complex upon a closer look is an effective narrative of current justice and societal traditions. The small work, a terracotta sculpture, itself harkens back to the method of production that is woven strongly into the tradition



of the Indus Valley civilization. This use of traditional methods of carving and sculpting effectively conveys Mangi's possible aims i.e. the use and subversion of tradition itself to critique it. The gender of those in the *Jirga* is ambiguous; they are hidden behind their cloaks, allowing the work to be ominous. From their backs leafless tree branches grow, suggesting perhaps the rootedness of the tradition and its



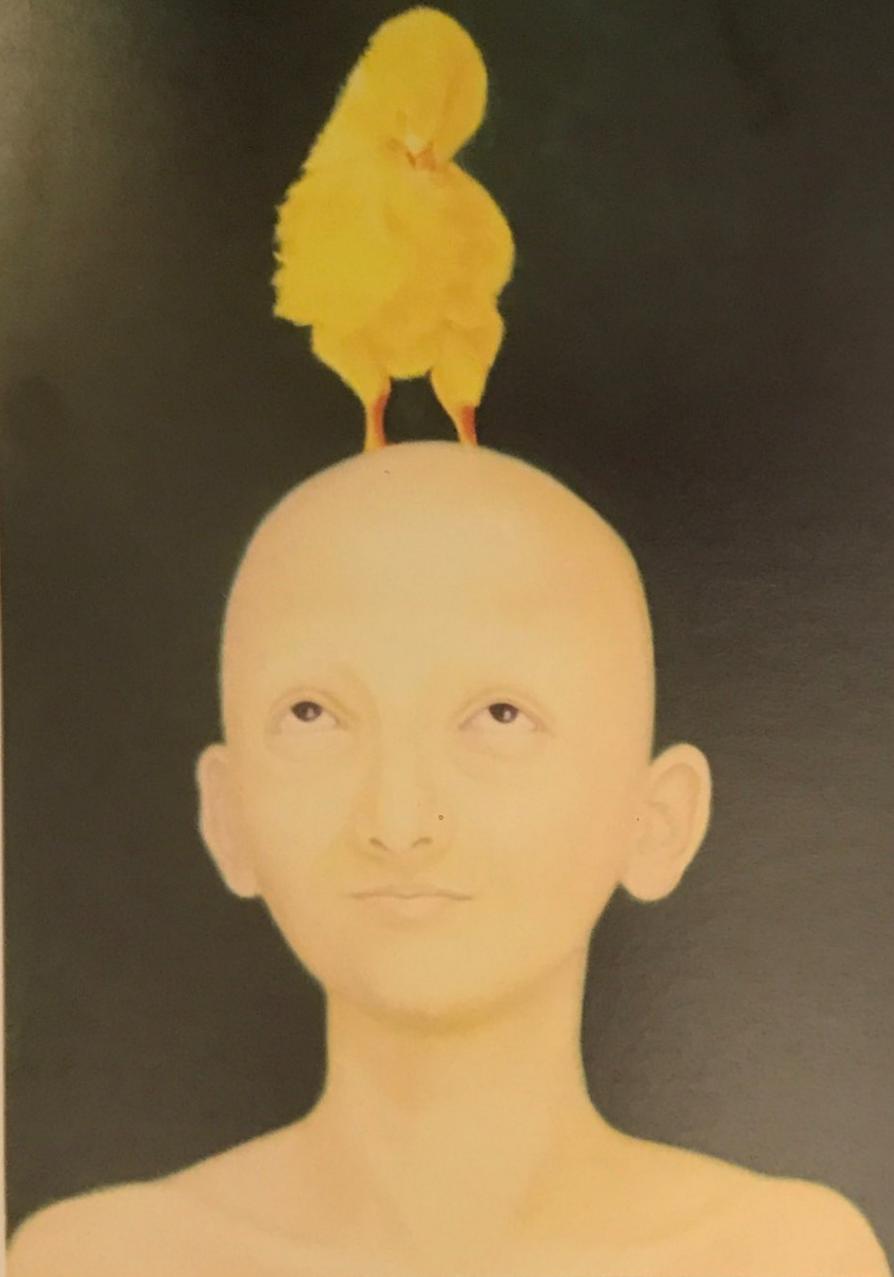
importance to our social structures. Their decision is paramount and binding, reflecting reality.

This idea of rootedness and tradition is also present in his work *The Women*. The work, depicting three upright hooded figures, their gender clarified only through the title, are imposing, suggesting strength and power. In a society where women are continuously marginalized, the artist seems to be trying to establish a different narrative i.e. their power, and their importance. Much attention is paid to the detail of their clothes, again in terracotta sculpture. The artist expertly fashions small flower like strokes across the cloth, giving the piece physical as well as visual depth. These two works, then, are refreshing in their ability to take on past ideas and bring on a new narrative. Mangi's attention to detail is to be applauded, and his ability to leave his strong work ambiguous for the viewer to interpret is a testament to his own inspiration as an artist. He leaves just enough room for us to navigate and bring our prejudices and stereotypes to be shattered, while giving us just enough background to create our meaning of his work. The narrative constructed by the viewer is unique and personal.

Chandio and Mangi then, are an important part of the corpus of artists who are increasingly taking on local issues and addressing them through powerful works of art. The fact that these artists hail from Jamshoro, and have decided to live and work there, makes it even more groundbreaking and important. ●

Syeda Hera Shakoore, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 182.9 cm, 2012 thesis, NCA, Rawalpindi

THE 11TH EMERGING TALENT EXHIBITION



● MAHA MALIK

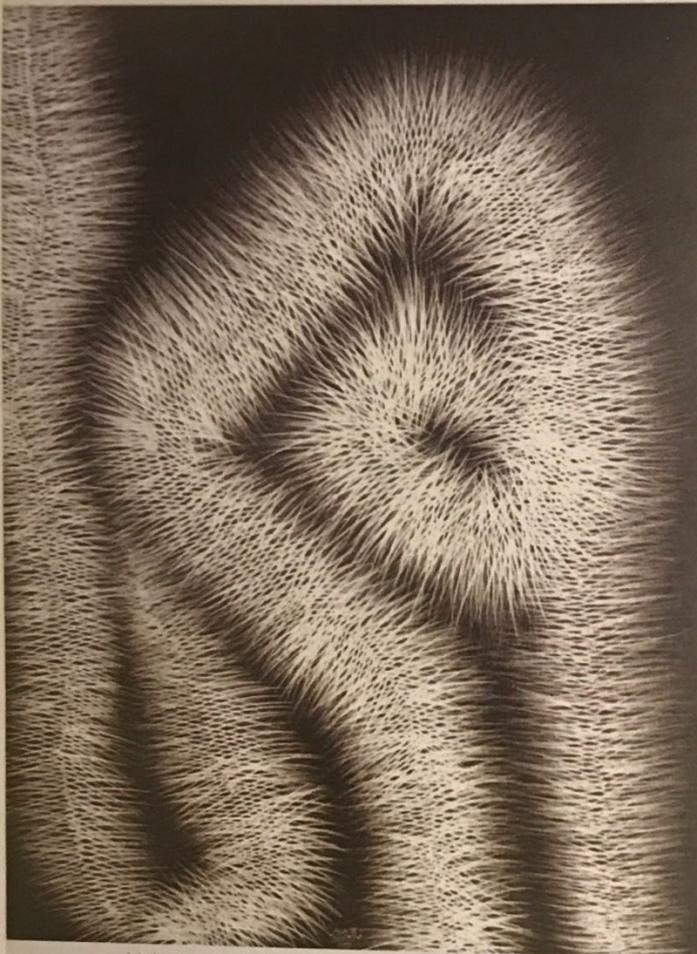
THINGS MATTER

A part of the Karachi-based VM Art Gallery's annual program is the Emerging Talent exhibition that provides a platform for selected thesis work by art school graduates nationwide. This year, 76 young men and women participated in the show. Over one hundred works were on display in three gallery spaces, spilling into a fourth faux-space, the stairwell. And whether wall-mounted, floor-standing, or digitized, here were

art objects that seemed to gaze out in gregarious, disaggregate communion. Director of the gallery and show curator, Ms. Riffat Alvi, initiated this critical gathering in early 2002. Inspired by similar shows in England, she considered it vital for fresh graduates, art institutions, and for viewers to come together annually, at a single local venue. The exhibition is in its 11th year now - supported by some

14 schools based in Karachi, Jamshoro, Quetta, Multan, Lahore, Gujrat, and Rawalpindi. (The visual art departments at Peshawar University and Islamia University, Bahawalpur, did not participate due to militancy on campus.)

Ms. Alvi clarifies methodology: "Students are nominated by key personnel at each institution, and then we further process the selection of works at VM." Consistent with earlier presentations, this show too is marked by great energy and warmth of function. However, the scale of such a project inherently suggests diverse aesthetic programs as well as an often diffused and derivative quality in the artwork itself. In this regard, institutional philosophy, teaching resources, and teachers themselves play a significant role. Ms. Alvi adds that a majority of students are unable to sustain their vocation past art school. For them, the show holds a kind of ephemeral power.



Muhammad Ali, *Hard Feeling*, pastels on paper, 167.6 x 127.508 cm, 2012 thesis, CEAD, Jamshoro

A pilot by training, Waqas has studied miniature painting at the NCA. His detailed gouache on vasli works ply tension between two opposing realms - the dystopic body, and, as it wrests inside the natural form. 'Ailment,' for instance, depicts a lushly rendered bird set against a flat background. The young falcon reveals within

itself, as though in x-ray view, the skeletal form of a vulture. According to the artist, when received ideologies (such as military patriotism) grow demystified through experience, they render a functional disturbance in the living system. Waqas's knowledge of aeronautics, anatomical form, and the miniature tradition serve his polemic, and do so with remarkable visual effect.

Hera Shakoor's large-format works also undertake a kind of self-splitting gesture. Her canvas-born characters include a pale, denuded figure and a small, brightly colored chick (self-portraits, both). Intensely pictured and atmospheric, her rendered tableaux are occasionally bemused and often unsettling. Shakoor suggests that the androgynous figure indicates liberation from cultural ideals of beauty imposed on women. And if there is sensual relief in her work, it may be found in the rich color fields that form the works' background. Like Waqas, this artist too sustains a kind of frisson without immediate resolve.

Amina El-Edrous explores the self within a digital format. Visually simple and technically arresting, her first piece

...Significantly then, the 11th Emerging Talent Exhibition is marked by material metaphor and non-traditional usage...



depicts the painterly gesture - a hand applying paint with a loaded brush - across a multiple segmented screen. The split narrative rhythmically moves towards the formation of a color field, an earthen, ochre surface, while estranged 'caterpillar' like arms conduct repeated labor. Her second piece works with self-segmentation as well. In this case, a single veiled figure splits numerous across the screen in the performance of prayer. El-Edrous works deftly with fragmentation and volume, building upon a visual, wave-like motion across the screen surface. "When you isolate a thing, you give it personality," suggests the modernist painter

Hamida Khatri, *Delirium II*, graphite on paper, 182.9 x 478.79 cm, 2012 thesis, IVSAA, Karachi

and sculptor Fernand Leger. These artists seem to reverse the starting point. They begin with the assumption of personality, coherent form, and then play into its places of privation, multiplicity, as though personhood were made of a material more malleable than otherwise decreed. The performance of parts is, however, rendered without collegiate angst, with a maturity of craft and concept that indicates strong work to come.

Collectively, and out of sheer numerical presence, three institutions tend to dominate the exhibition: the Visual Arts Department at Karachi University, Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture, and Center of Excellence in Art and Design, Jamshoro. And if there is an overriding thematic, it is this - that things matter. Here I do not mean, or solely indicate, the sense of art as exchange value, as a commodity to be consumed. Instead, the very 'thingness' or materiality of works - their physical instance - show in a hyper visible way. Objects press at the heart of visibility in this year's display.

Tehmina Maknoja's iron pipe structure *Tinga Tori* greets us at the entry of the Rangoonwala building. At the entrance of the gallery itself stands a solitary wing, made of welded stainless steel forks and spoons, and titled *Migration*. Further into the show a giant fiberglass pomegranate lies split open, revealing an interior of blue-dotted dice glazed in thick wax (Amber Iftikhar, *Ek Anaar Sau Bimar*).

A litany of things may so be observed: an oversized foot made of steel screws; miniature incision instruments

and a deodar bust; painted egg shells; a Sindhi ajrak made of silicon feeder nipples; the wind-blown curtain crafted from stippling onto sheet metal; a bullet-proof jacket composed of computer type-keys; near obsolete, a weathered, wooden mailbox; a jama'at (congregation) in prayer made of colored beads; a mobile steel structure covered in cut-glass mirrors. Whether proposed as installation, sculpture, or reinterpreted canvas-works, the pervasive presence of material spills over conventional form. Stretched canvases, paper, and frames themselves begin to convey independent physical presence.

Some of the force of such articulation may be traced to the 'popular art' movement, especially definitive of the nineties in Karachi. With practitioners such as Durriya Kazi, David Alesworth, Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi at its forefront, the period was marked by a move away from traditional high art concerns, and an orientation towards vernacular urban craft, local material-use, and ethical collaboration. Internationally, the blurring of boundaries between visual culture and art history departments has led to an ever-expanding field of study, over the last two decades.

One is also reminded here of the resilient modernist coda: 'no ideas but in things.' And a stellar ledger of artists comes to mind who have addressed this principle in their work, in both two and three dimensional form. An arbitrary listing may include Ayaz Jakhio, Huma Mulji, Rashid Rana, Naiza Khan, Ruby and Khaleel Chishti. Conceptually sophisticated and iconoclastic, their investigations permit for more nuanced meaning between the material world, selfhood, and the work of art.

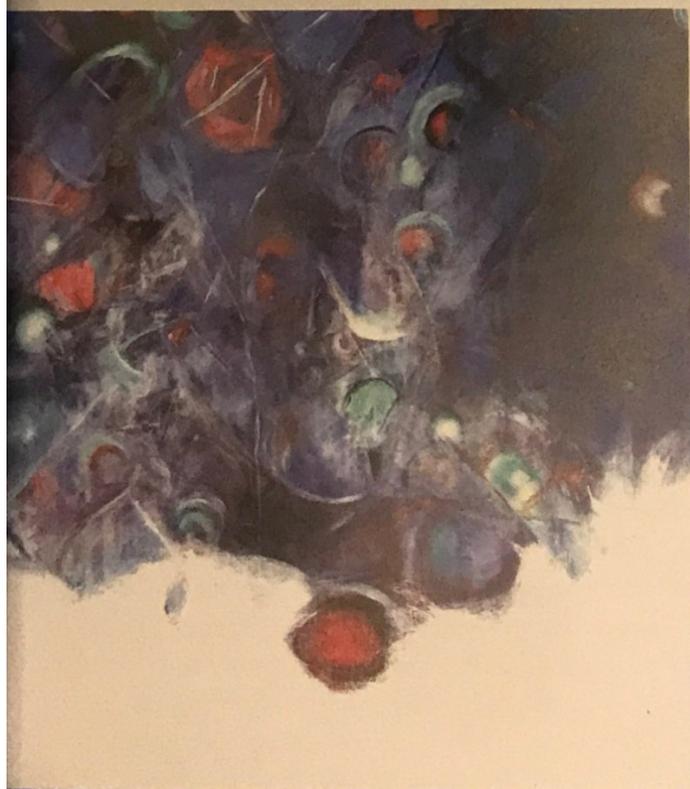
Such perspective seems all the more critical if we consider the 'seismic present', as one aspect of contemporary art and culture in Pakistan. Thinking about things, about the nature of materiality, and about our relationship to locality appears as necessity. Significantly then, the 11th Emerging Talent Exhibition is marked by material metaphor and non-traditional usage. As a driving gesture, this influences the viewing and integrity of all displayed works. And it demands further counsel. For there is much as yet to say about things, be they monstrous or mute or pleasurable, within us, and without. ●

#### END NOTES

[1] Fernand Leger, as referenced in *A Sense of Things*, by Bill Brown. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 2003.

[1] Simone Wille, doctoral thesis. "Contemporary Art in Pakistan: A Continual Process of Reconstructed Pasts and Anticipated Futures."

[1] William Carlos Williams. *Spring and All*. New Directions, New York: 1923, 2011



Aisra Bano, *Untitled*, oil on board, 48.26 x 302.26 cm, 2012 thesis, CEAD, Jamshoro

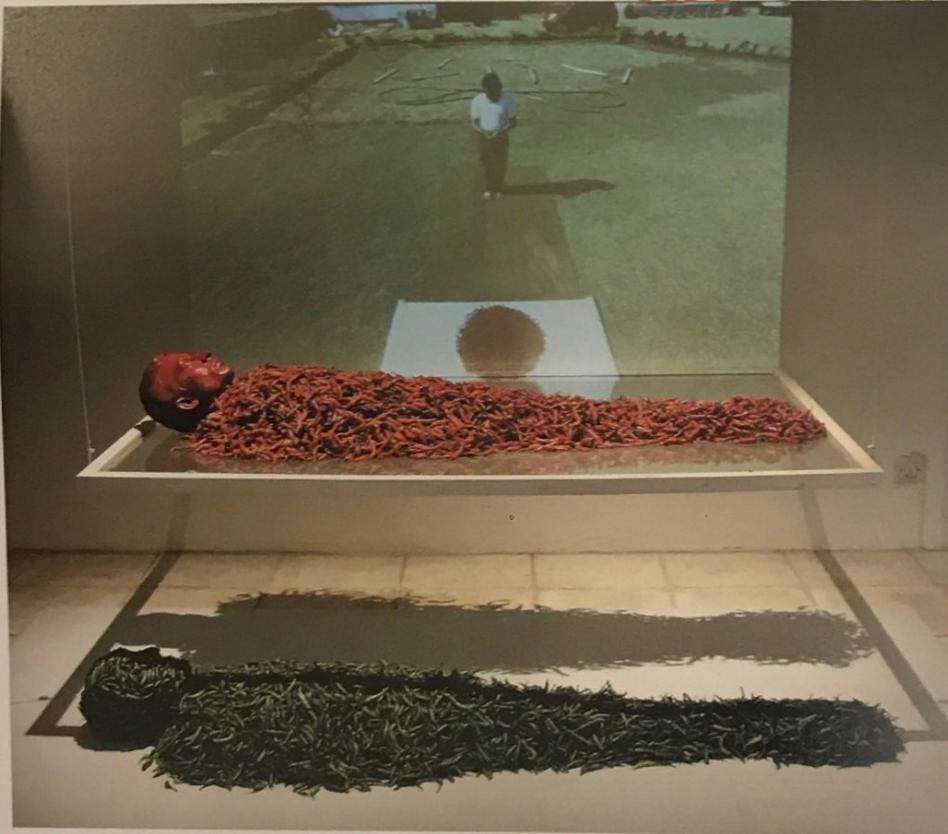
● RUMANA HUSAIN

"WHO WE ARE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM WHERE WE'RE FROM."

- Malcolm Gladwell

THE SHOW:

'SEVEN DEADLY SINS'



Sadia Rasheed, R. M. Naeem, Rashid Rasheed, 'Envy' - the few who do are the envy of the many who only watch, installation, 2013



'Envy', (detail) Photo credit: Rumana Husain

The Bible lists seven attitudes in men and women that the Lord finds most detestable. These are "haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Architect Arshad Faruqi, curator of the show *Seven*

*Deadly Sins*, held in August 2013 at Koel Gallery in Karachi, invited architects, artists, designers and a writer to give a different spin to the sins by making installations depicting the vices: *Envy, Gluttony, Greed, Lust, Pride, Sloth* and *Wrath* - none of which align with the cardinal sins classified by orthodox Christianity. However, these sins are the ones that society views more popularly. Perhaps Dante's epic poem, *The Divine Comedy* (in

which he reflects about his own choice of worldly pleasures over a life of simple duties) or perhaps the psychologically violent 1995 American serial-killer thriller film, *Seven*, was the curator's inspiration, in which the sadistic killer had intended the murders to correspond to the seven deadly sins. Historically, it was in 590 that Pope Gregory I revised the original 4th century A.D. list of sins generated by a monk, Evagrius Ponticus, stemming from problems he saw in his own day, and it was Pope Gregory's list on which Dante based his three-part journey into the afterlife.

The show, *Seven Deadly Sins* therefore needs to be viewed within this historical background as well as in the present-day context of the society / country we live in. The belief that judgment and retribution for our sins are part of God's way of running a fair and ethical world is central to almost all belief-systems, and the seven contrary 'heavenly virtues': faith, hope, charity, fortitude, justice, temperance and prudence have forever been in conflict with the mortal sins.

Given the rather limited space of the gallery, some installations did not have enough 'breathing' space where the viewers would have a choice of stepping back at a comfortable distance to appreciate the works. Perhaps, instead of the participants working on their own after getting the curator's brief, a more cohesive engagement among the seven installations could have taken care of the size and space/area allotted to each. One also wonders if '*Gluttony*' could have moved out into the gallery's sister concern - a café - which spills into a courtyard just outside the gallery. *Gluttony* was created by author Mohsin Hamid and architect Omar Hasan (both based in Lahore) on a tiled platform with two walls covered with the same tile surface. The bulging walls converged vertically into a beam of light shining between the two. It was as if the walls were dissolving into infinity - an endless desire for consumption.

In the installation *McPakistan* depicting '*Greed*', graphic designer Sara Chapra and architect Omar Omari presented the corruption in Pakistan with a conceptual

installation. Created on the wall of the gallery with eight blood bags (each with an upside down alphabet) they fashioned the word 'Pakistan'. The intravenous plastic tubing with 'blood' created a conduit that connected all the eight blood bags depicting the sucking of the nation's blood. Each bag supposedly contained sinister material

Mohsin Hamid, Omar Hasan, '*Gluttony*', installation, 2013



Sara Chapra, Omar Omari, '*Greed* - *McPakistan*, I'm loving it, installation, 2013

Installations have their own dynamics in which the spatial dimension of the gallery cannot be ignored. *The Seven Deadly Sins* installations could have potentially transformed the gallery space into an interactive and even surreal experience had the space not been so constricted. Besides the installation of the artworks, it needs to be examined whether or not the installations established a relationship with each other and for any new ground broken.

indicative of corruption. It was one of the most successful installations but was limited to a single aspect of greed, relating it only with corruption in the government.

There was a threat of cliché that lurked in '*Lust*', which was limited entirely to yearning and desire for physical pleasure. To depict this, a video of the talented television

actor Sarwat Gillani was projected on one wall, playing out a poem pinned to a wall on the opposite side. This installation was put up by architects Naheed Mashooqullah and Samir Sadruddin. A cot lying in the middle, with a crumpled white sheet on it, made it all too literal and base, and created a conflict with the aesthetics of the video.

Artist R. M. Naeem, architect Rashid Rasheed and designer Sadia Rasheed collaborated for 'Envy'. Breathing new life

Arshad Faruqi, Seema Nusrat, 'Sloth' - Gathari, installation, 2013



'Sloth' (detail) Photo credit Rumana Husain

in that work "as a metaphor for the "hot" relationship between Pakistan and India. Beautiful on the surface, the pepper's taste is volatile, mutable. In the video the ever changing arrangements and motion of the peppers occur in relation to a border line of brown earth." For the 'Envy' installation, the metaphor of the red and green chillies worked, but the video did not seem to have a co-relation with the two figures.

Arshad Faruqi and artist Seema Nusrat collaborated on the sin of being a 'Sloth'. I don't know if the pun was meant to be obvious in the selection of this particular sin as Faruqi was the curator of the show, therefore hardly guilty of being a sloth! Their installation consisted of shelves and tables with snowed under snow-white nets and laces or crocheted coverings that enclosed books, mugs, glasses, lamps, photo-frames,

shoes, and several other objects of ordinary-use. The 'gatharees' (bundles) depicted a sense of abandonment ... too lazy to touch, move, open, sort out.

We are currently in the middle of a societal, political, economical and religious upheaval in which the message of the 'sins' is an important one. The best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell writes in his book 'The Tipping Point' - how little things can make a big difference' about a certain 'Stickiness Factor', which means that one can present an idea in a manner that it becomes sticky, memorable, and even though some of the 'sins' worked well and the others not so well, this show undoubtedly had the 'Stickiness Factor'. ●

Photo credit: Koel Gallery



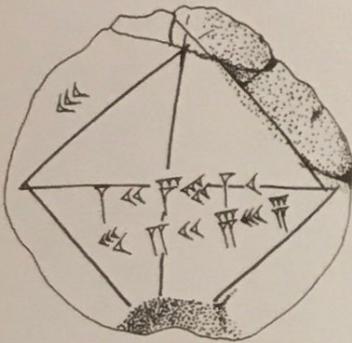
Naheed Mashooqullah, Samir Sadruddin, 'Lust', installation, 2013,

into the unmoving, resting human forms created with hundreds of red and green chillies, this installation was successful in holding the attention of the audience. In an oblique way it reminded one of Chinese artist Ju Duoqi who transforms vegetables into artworks. Indian artist Sakshi Gupta has also created an installation with red chillies some years back, making a canopy of chillies over a cot, perhaps in the same strong South Asian tradition of warding off the evil eye. Envy was made up with one green-chili-peppers-man lying on the ground and one red-chili-peppers-man lying just above him on a glass sheet suspended from the wall. A video played on the wall, which was from R.M. Naeem's residency at Sandarbh Artists Workshop in Partapur - a town in Rajasthan, India. Naeem had used red chillies

● RASHEED ARAEEN

# PRELIMINARY NOTES

## for the Understanding of Historical Significance of Geometry in Arab/Islamic Thought, and its Suppressed Role in the Genealogy of World History.



Clay Tablets, Babylonian Collection, Yale University, USA

The idea that began its journey with the pyramids of Egypt, about 2600 BC, entered Greece about 2300 years later and 'transformed geometry into an exact abstract reasoning device'.<sup>1</sup> In both Egypt and Mesopotamia geometry had provided not only an instrument of measurement but 'produced monumental modes of artistic expression (e.g. temples, palaces, sculpture, etc.), which were without precedent'.<sup>2</sup> But in Greece, still preoccupied with gods and their visual manifestation in sculpture, geometry seemed to have played little role in the development of art that expressed abstract thinking. And despite Euclid's great achievement in developing geometry as a theoretical discourse, which in fact laid the foundation of (modern) mathematics, it remained confined within the elaboration of this discourse. It was only the spirit of Islam, which about twelve hundred years later transformed the rationality of abstract thinking enshrined within geometry into a sensory form of artistic expression.<sup>3</sup> The aim of these preliminary notes - though somewhat fragmentary - is to initiate a serious investigation into the historical significance of the emergence and development of geometry as an artistic form in Islamic art, which, in my view, not only expresses a historical continuity of knowledge produced by the Greeks but takes this knowledge further in the rational trajectory of history, which now reaches our own modern times. The context of this initiative is therefore the present state of the world, particularly the Muslim world.

Why has the Muslim world now fallen to a state where its tradition of rational thinking - enshrined particularly in geometry - is no longer functional?

Why has it abandoned the dignity of its own self-consciousness and the spirit that in the past produced great knowledge in science, philosophy and art, and is now just emulating others?

Why has it thus trapped itself within a worldview that in fact opposes and denies the Muslim world not only its own spirit but its place in the genealogy of world history?

Is it possible now to recover the past achievements of the Arab/Islamic history and its own worldview? And how? Can we now retrieve and revive the Islamic history without allowing the individual mind to think freely and rationally, so that it can understand not only the significance of the past but how can this past now guide us, collectively, to move forward?

**RATIONALITY OF HISTORY**

History is supposed to have begun some 6000 or 7000 years ago with the emergence of urban settlements, particularly in Mesopotamia and then in Ancient Egypt, leading to cities that gave rise to kingdoms and then civilizations.<sup>4</sup> Having somewhat not only resolved the problem of basic subsistence but also developed the ability to accumulate surplus with a system of its distribution, humans turned to thinking about the meaning of what they were surrounded by and their own existence within it. The questions that arose from this thinking were not only about one's own existence in the world but the world itself: who created all that was on earth and the universe? What was the meaning of life? How could human beings connect themselves with that which created them? It seems the answers to all this then lay within the human body itself and its self-consciousness; its own physicality revealing what was most intelligent in nature but also the invisible force or entity that produced this intelligence. This led to an organized system of thinking in which the invisible force became gods that had human bodies. In fact, humans became gods and the gods into humans.

With 'man' looking at his own body and admiring it, he began to worship it as if it was or represented the body of the divine. But this narcissism became an obstacle not only to human imagination, which needed freedom to go beyond the body, but also its ability to bring together people in a rationally organized collective without which humanity could not move forward towards a meaningful and better future. So, the human spirit eventually rid itself of the gods, which occupied the human body and prevented its mind to develop potentials inherent within itself. It was necessary for the mind to enhance its ability to think about and reflect upon not only one's own being but its place in the universe. Although monotheism of the Abrahamic religions was the first to realize the fallacy of idol worship and confronted it with a transcendental perception of the divine, it was also the Greeks who strove to free themselves from the burden of supernatural or divine explanations for whatever occurred in the world. It was their self-consciousness that recognized the creative potential of the independent mind and developed a rational and humanised discourse, resulting in an enormous body of knowledge in science, philosophy and the arts that allowed humanity to march forward guided by the power of its creative imagination.



Acropolis, Greece

Although Hegel had insisted on the centrality of the body in human self-consciousness, he realised that the sensory form that revealed the spirit during the classical Greek period had not only reached its peak in the Greek sculpture but it had since deteriorated...

But the march of Greek rationality (or the spirit) was retarded or somewhat halted by the rise first of the Roman Empire and then Christianity, which adopted some of the Roman myths and brought back the Divine to the earth in the form of a Man; thus placing Man at the centre of the universe and allowing Man-the-Divine to rule the earth. This was the beginning of the Dark Age in Europe's history, which by turning its back on the mind's potential to understand the universe in its own rational way in fact denied the humanity which was the Divine's most precious gift to it: the creativity of the mind.

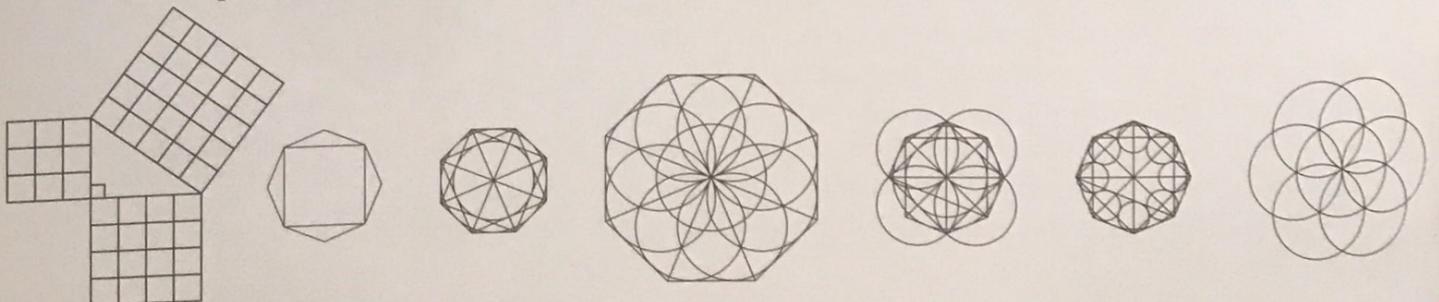
The Arabs at the time were also trapped in the darkness of ignorance - *Jahiliyya* - worshiping idols until Islam arrived in the seventh century AD. Detached from the history that embodied humanity's rational knowledge, the human spirit was trapped in a darkness which could not generate a self-consciousness beyond oneself and take the idea of human knowledge further in pursuit of the spirit for self-fulfilment. What was therefore required was not only one's own consciousness of being in the world but also its history, which allowed the spirit to come out of the darkness of ignorance and reveal itself, and also travel from one period to another of human history, carrying forward the ideas of the past to the present and then to the future. But since the journey of the art form, representing the human body in painting and sculpture, had taken place from Egypt to Greece and the early Christian period to the Arabs of *Jahiliyya*, the spirit could not return to the past and recover itself in the form that had receded historically. It needed a new sensory form that not only transgressed the sensuousness of the body but also moved forward to a higher level of self-consciousness free from the body's narcissism.

What was therefore historically needed was a system that not only just accepted the divine message but also followed its multilayered complexity that encouraged the human mind to the independence of thinking and creating. With the arrival of the Qur'an, the divine message was not only confirmed, with all its attributes, but offered the way for humanity how it should organize itself not necessarily merely to submit

to His message but for the betterment and welfare of humanity. What was most extraordinary about this message was a repudiation of any physical relationship of the Divine with 'man' or human beings, creating both the infinity of distance and nearness between the Divine and humans which could only be penetrated and grasped through the contemplative power of imagination. This in fact allowed the imagination to wander freely in the universe and explore its vastness, producing a knowledge whose rationality for some first appeared to contradict the revealed message but which in fact complemented it. It was this relationship between the revealed knowledge and what it engendered and encouraged as 'secular' or rational discourse that underlies the spirit of Islam.

There is a general misconception that Islam was explicit about the representation of living beings in art. Islam emerged as an opposition to idol worship and to the idea that perceived the Divine in the form of human body. It was therefore not the question of Islam forbidding the images of living beings, particularly human beings. But these images had no place in what Islam came or stood for; they were anathema to and could not represent the spirit of Islam. The art that emerged in the Muslim world could not therefore be based on the human body, or the images of living beings,<sup>5</sup> but had to go beyond whence the spirit was free from the sensuous physicality of the body and revealed itself as the abstract thinking ability of the mind.

It was indeed the Arabs' openness to other cultures after they adopted Islam, and particularly their encounter with the Greeks, that allowed them to seize whatever was there as knowledge and transform it into what defined the Islamic spirit and its place in history. The arrival of Greek knowledge<sup>6</sup> in the ninth-century Baghdad and its translation into Arabic laid the foundation of what is known as Arab or Islamic philosophy. Within this knowledge was Euclid's basic geometry of square, circle and triangle which fascinated the Arab mind. Although the discourse of geometry played a fundamental role in Arab science and philosophy, particularly in astronomy and cosmology,



my concern here is with what led to its emergence as a unique sensory form of art. It is not only about what emerged as a body of highly complex geometric forms, with *symmetry* as its constant basis, but also their philosophical and historical significances. Were these geometric forms devised merely for decorating the architecture, as they are often seen, or they expressed something more profound? I want to suggest here that they were not just the exercises in pattern-making, to



Geometric Pattern, Alhambra, Spain

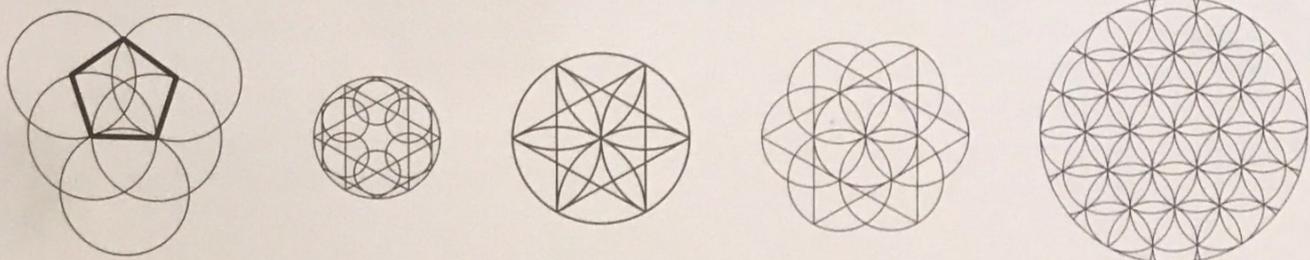


fill the empty spaces of architecture, but involved an imagination, which was able to penetrate the cosmos and revealed what was invisible to the eye; making visible not only the abstractness of the Divine but also the nature of the infinite cosmos which it created.

This entry of Greek knowledge into the Arab/Islamic consciousness is in fact a historical journey of the spirit from its suppression in Europe of the Middle Ages to its freedom in the Arab/Muslim world; representing also the movement of art from its early formations based on the imitation of what humans observe in nature to their contemplation through a mental process that involves abstract thinking. In this process, human self-consciousness moves from what it observes and experiences towards what it can get rid of, its extraneous and superficial elements; and then its spirit penetrates the observed thing to reveal its essence through a sensory form, which is of historical significance. From this we can actually conclude that the spirit of Islamic art represents the historical movement from Egypt-Mesopotamia to Greece to the Arabs, from whose genius geometry emerges as a sensory art form, revealing not only the sensuous complexity of its own formation but enshrined within it is a rational discourse that becomes the basis of Arab or Islamic civilization, and whose worldview opposes and transgresses the idea that places 'man' at the centre of the universe.

The meditation on the revealed knowledge actually first produced the art form of calligraphy, but its sensory form was within the particularity of Arabic language. While firmly grounding itself in this particularity, the free imagination of the Islamic spirit also needed to go beyond and produce a form of art, which transcended this grounding and became universal, particularly in a world with enormously diverse cultures and languages. It was however the very contemplation of the revealed knowledge that enhanced the ability of the mind to comprehend the world through a sensory form (of calligraphy), which when moved to its next stage revealed the universality of the spirit enshrined in geometry.

This multiple function of the mind in fact represents Islam's true message. While the mind must accept the revealed knowledge and incorporate it within whatever is already there in the world as knowledge, it must also respond to all this through self-consciousness and thus go beyond to create what is not there before in the world. It was this ability of creative mind to accept what it received, admiringly and critically, and then to go beyond it that led to the shift from calligraphy to geometry in Islamic art; that is, from the meditation on the given to a creation of the system of thought with its own rationality, which gave rise to an entirely unprecedented new language of art. The sensuousness



of geometric forms in Islamic art is self-determined, representing a self-consciousness that involves perception and conception simultaneously.

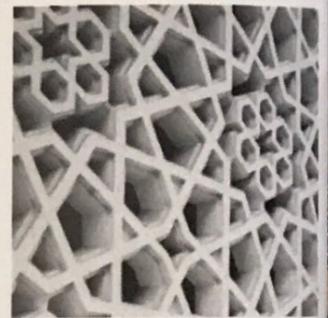
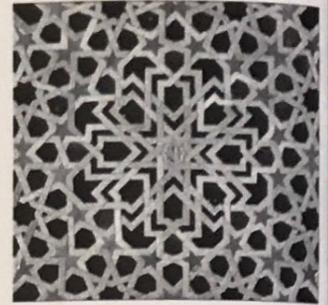
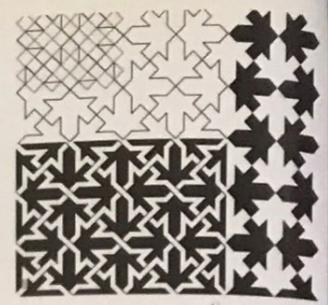
Geometry in Islamic art thus represents a paradigm shift in the evolution of human thought, from the observation of things and their re-presentation as they appear to the eye to the creation of an art form whose sensuousness is the product of pure abstract thinking; giving thus the imagination enormous power to think but also unprecedented freedom to create.

### AN ENLIGHTENMENT OF EUROPE

In 1623, Galileo argued that 'the grand book' of the universe was 'written in the language of mathematics and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures,...without these one is wandering about in a dark labyrinth'. How did he know all this? Was this not already established six centuries earlier in Baghdad? Of course, Europe was then trapped in the 'dark labyrinth' of its own perceived conflict between the revealed message and secular knowledge; and it only emerged from this darkness when it saw the light coming from Toledo and Cordoba of Islamic Spain. It was in Cordoba that the great Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126 - 1198) proved theoretically - following the work of Greek philosopher Aristotle - that there was no conflict between the revealed message and secular knowledge but that they complemented each other. About a hundred years later, Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274), a Catholic theologian and thinker, picked up this dialectic and open the door to a European enlightenment.

Although the light of knowledge from the Muslim world already began to reach Europe in the 12th century, it was the work of Ibn Rushd, after its influence spread in Europe through Thomas Aquinas that helped to lift the Church's ban on the teaching of Aristotle. In fact, Averroism (following Ibn Rushd) was the dominant influence in Western thought from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The important point here is that although modern Western philosophy began its journey with the knowledge that originated with the Greeks, it was the Arabs who had developed this classical knowledge further and elaborated it before it reached Europe and produced the European Renaissance. Arab/Islamic history is therefore central to the history that links Europe with the ancient Greeks and the knowledge Europe produced following this link that laid the foundation for the modern world.

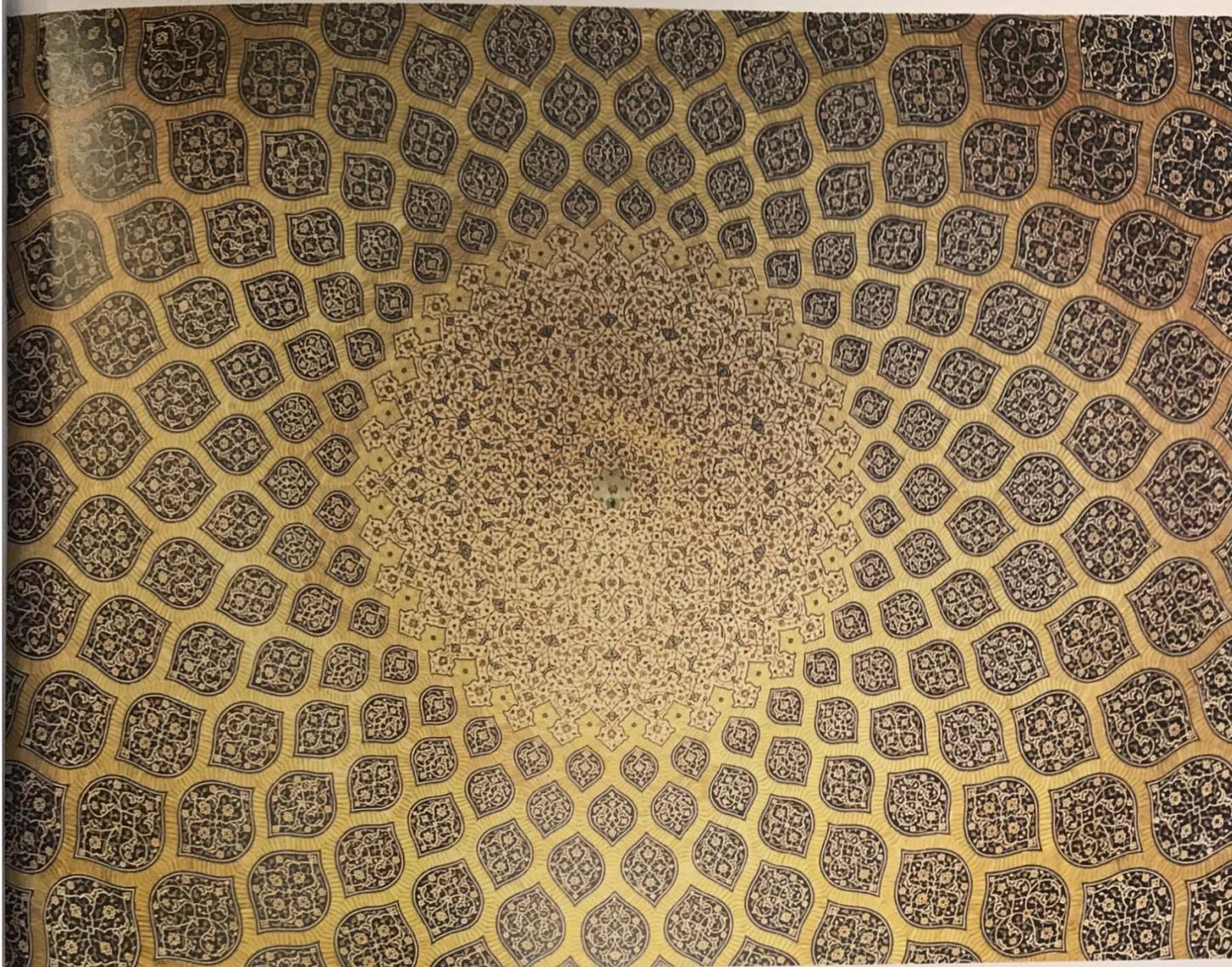
Geometry with its multi-faceted complex symmetry, which first emerged and revealed itself as a sensory form in the Islamic culture representing its spirit, is now fundamental to modern self-consciousness and imagination...



### HEGEL'S DIVERSION

But for Hegel this reality of history was unacceptable, because it clashed with a view and philosophy of history that placed Europe at the centre of world history, from the Egyptian to the Greek and Christian eras and then to the modern. In fact, while theorising the genealogy of history, he completely removed Islamic history from this genealogy and established direct links between the modern Europe and the ancient Greeks. Why did he do this? Hegel was a profound thinker of Western philosophy, and his discourse constantly emphasised the truthfulness of reason and rational mind and what it produced as knowledge. Yet he fell to the view that constructed the whole history of humanity not on a rational basis but which went against the truthfulness of actual history.

What concerns me here however is the role of Greek art in Hegel's view and his subsequent definition and formulation of the whole human history. After being discovered during the Renaissance, Greek sculpture became the focus of the eighteenth-century German art historian J J Winckelmann, whose fascination with it actually inspired Hegel. And Hegel became so obsessed with the beauty of Greek sculpture that he saw in it the highest peak of art's achievement. Based on this fascination, Hegel then developed his philosophy of history on the primacy and representation of the



Dome interior at a Mosque in Isfahan, Iran

human figure in art; arguing that only the *sensory form of human body* was capable of revealing the human spirit and realizing self-consciousness that could move history.<sup>7</sup> It seems that this argument led Hegel to conclude that the spirit of Islam had remained submerged; it never made itself visible or revealed itself as a sensory form of the body so that we could see it, experience it with the eyes and then know its significance.

Geometry, for Hegel, had no sensory form because it did not represent the physicality of the human body; which of course was a flawed argument. It had no rational or scientific basis but only an assumption which placed 'man' at the centre of the universe, which then became an ideological predetermination that placed Europe's, or the West's, own self-consciousness exclusively at the centre of the world, a centre defined by historical genealogy that connected Europe directly

with the Greeks. Only within this genealogy, according to Hegel, could emerge the Absolute human spirit that would define the destiny of the world.

Although Hegel had insisted on the centrality of the body in human self-consciousness, he realized that the sensory form that revealed the spirit during the classical Greek period had not only reached its peak in the Greek sculpture but it had since deteriorated. As the sensory form had become subordinated to the ideology of medieval Christian art, in which art became the pictorial representation of the stories of Christianity, particularly the crucifixion of Christ, it lost its freedom to reveal and realise itself freely by and in itself. From this Hegel seemed to have concluded at the beginning of the nineteenth century that the sensory form of art was no longer capable of revealing the spirit in the forward movement of history.

What is significant in this scenario was Hegel's insistence

Stone carving from Makli Necropolis, Pakistan



not only on establishing a historical genealogy from Egypt to Greece to the medieval Christian Europe, leading on to the modern, but also this genealogy representing the continuity of the historical march of human self-consciousness and its spirit in pursuit of its ultimate fulfilment. With art reaching its climax in the ancient Greek sculpture and then declining with Christian art, how could human spirit then continue its journey? Answering this question, Hegel declared the end of art. The spirit must now find a new and different form to proceed further, not just through any form but that which must place Europe or the West at the centre of the universe. 'For Hegel', says Enrique Dussel, 'the Spirit of Europe (the German spirit) is the absolute Truth that determines or realizes itself through itself without owing anything to anyone.'<sup>8</sup> Criticising Hegel's Eurocentrism, Dussel elaborates this further:

The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. Its aim is the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination (*selbstbestimmung*) of Freedom - that Freedom which has its own absolute form itself as its purport.<sup>9</sup>

This new modern world has thus been created not by the free spirit of history, which passed through the Muslim world before it enlightened Europe, but by the Spirit solely embodied in Europe - in the body of European man himself that now replaces the sensory form of art that originated in the ancient world but

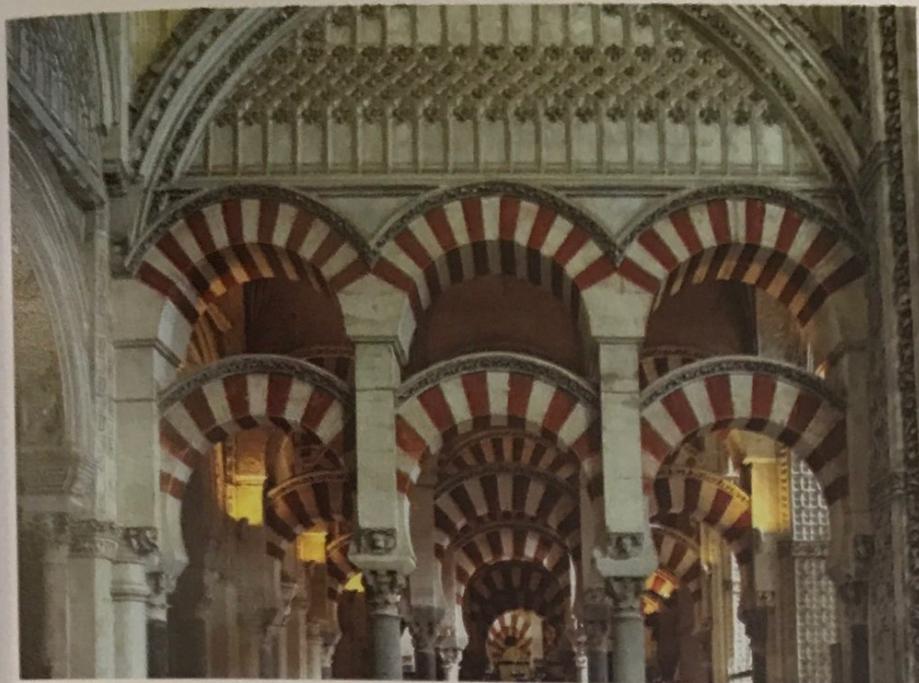
continues its journey in Hegel's philosophy of world history. This history is the history of white man and his civilization that now dominates the world.

What is extraordinary about this new Spirit is that it is not embodied in an art form which has progressively evolved through the rationality of the spirit's journey through many cultures and civilizations, but is determined only by Western philosophy which confuses narcissism with self-consciousness.<sup>10</sup> When Hegel looks at the body of a Greek sculpture, with its idealised facial features of the white race, he reflects his gaze back towards his own body, the body of Europe that has now triumphed in conquering the world; and the narcissism of the infantile ego thus

becomes fixed, eternally, by this conquest. It cannot therefore function or operate in relation to others, recognising in others a human spirit, but by dominating others in order to deny them of their own self-consciousness and the power of its spirit. The infantile ego cannot therefore engage in 'reconciliation and resolution' - as Hegel's own dialectics propose - a way of coming to terms with differences and conflicts. The mirror in which the West therefore looks at its own body, admirably, is the mirror which has now been turned toward the world; and with the West's own image thus fixed on to this world mirror others are denied their own reflections.

### RETURN OF THE OPPRESSED

The idea began its journey with the dawn of human self-consciousness, travelling through many historical periods, many cultures and civilisations, sometimes revealing itself through a sensory form of art, other times suppressed for centuries, lying dormant but not dead. The idea never dies, as human spirit never dies. After remaining suppressed or laying dormant for centuries, it can always emerge again and make itself visible with a new force, revealing itself as a new form in the world. My account here only deals with the idea's movement through the cultural spaces surrounding the Mediterranean that have been constantly interacting and influencing each other. This movement, with the



Historical Mosque in Cordoba, Spain

emergence of modern ideas based on the rationality of science and their world-wide circulation, has now become global. And within this movement of modernity or modernism the re-emergence of geometry has occurred, not only as a sensory form within modern sculpture but also fundamental to modern science. Geometry with its multi-faceted complex symmetry, which first emerged and revealed itself as a sensory form in the Islamic culture representing its spirit, is now fundamental to modern self-consciousness and imagination that has penetrated the cosmos in its pursuit to reveal and comprehend its nature.

What is most important here is that art in the 20th century has demolished the very primacy and superiority of the Western tradition of art that obsessed Hegel, so much so that he was blind to forms of art in other cultures or emanating from non-European civilizations: The emergence of abstract form in modern art, symmetry underpinning its formations, particularly in Minimalism, has in fact vindicated the centrality of geometry in the spirit's historical journey from its early periods to the modern.

The formulation and development of Minimalism, one of the most important post-war avant-garde movements, depends on the symmetry and seriality that are fundamental to the geometry of Islamic art, and confirms the importance for the modern world of those ideas that emerged almost a thousand years ago from the Islamic spirit; which also shows that the Islamic spirit can assert its position again, both historically and universally, and in doing so it can re-affirm its ability to move forward in the modern world in its own way.

## THE MUSLIM WORLD TODAY

The art of geometry still prevails in the Arab/Muslim world, but without any substance. It has now been emptied of its spirit and turned into the decorative patterns one finds in the hotel lobbies, airport lounges, shopping malls, etc, representing the intellectual vacuousness of the Muslim world in general today. Geometric patterns now gloss over this emptiness rather than reveal the spirit that produced a great civilisation. The humanism of Islamic spirit is trapped deep inside the darkness

of its own dogmas, shutting its eyes and closing its mind to what it might imagine in its own right and create something new and significant. Even though what was once fundamental to the Islamic spirit has now re-emerged in modernity, after five hundred years of its submersion under the sea of Western dominance, and has confronted its Eurocentric ideology and transformed modernity as a humanized global force, the *Muslim world is totally unaware of this*.<sup>11</sup> The eyes of the Muslim world open only when there is something glittering, but they cannot penetrate beyond that glittering surface. When eyes are so overwhelmed by a glittering spectacle, entry to the mind becomes blocked. In other words, the crisis of the Muslim world today is in the blockage of its own mind, resulting in its inability to penetrate what lies behind and beyond the appearance of things. A dysfunctional imagination cannot contemplate beyond what appears to and enchants the eye.

The rationality of the Islamic spirit has returned, but it has no place within the Muslim world. It now wanders - sometime aimlessly - in the world that once excluded it from history. Which takes me back to the question I raised in the beginning: how can the Muslim world now retrieve and revive its creative spirit?

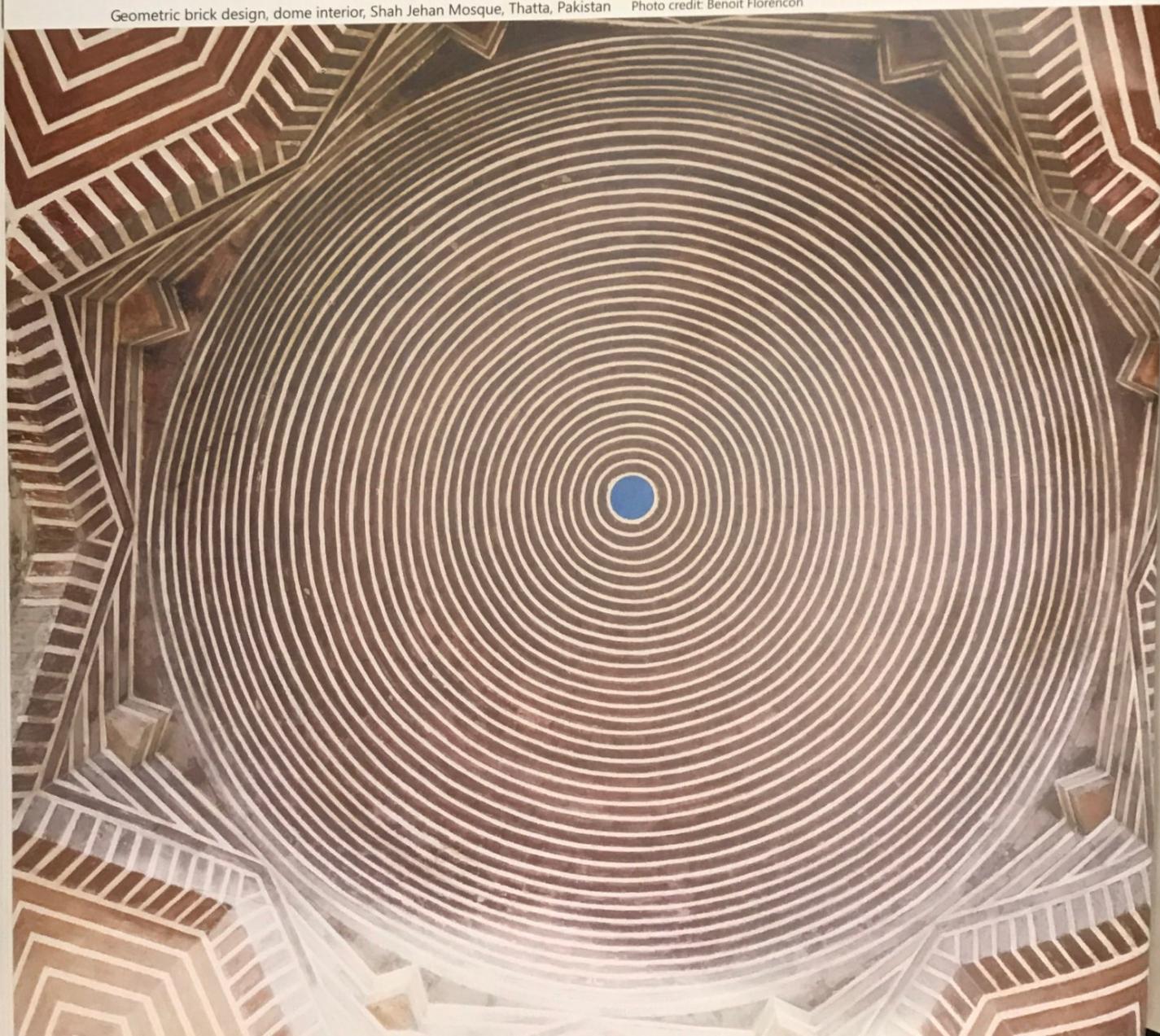
There is no lack of individuals from the Muslim world with exceptional talents and creative imagination, but many are exiled from where they should be. They are exiled not because they offer a threat to the political power of the ruling classes, but because they cannot operate within a milieu that now dominates the Muslim world and traps the intellectual abilities of its

intelligentsia within the culture of mediocrity. This has in fact produced complacency, conformism and delusion, antithetical to creative imagination, creating conditions for a kind of modern *Jahiliyya* which destroys the ultimate fulfilment of the spirit: its pursuit for the freedom of imagination.

What does the Muslim world now want? Does it want to move forward intelligently and creatively, in the interest of the collective *Umma*, or remain deluded by what the oil money has produced for some? The true spirit of Islam is not merely in its prescribed rituals but in what these should lead to: an obligation to others (*Haquq-ul-Ibad*), not only to our fellow Muslims but humanity at large. The golden age of Islam addressed itself to all humanity by pursuing and creating knowledge in the interest of all humanity. What is there now for the Muslim world to offer to all humanity? Oil? My argument here is not about the centrality of

geometry in the Islamic thought, by which I do not mean only its artistic form, nor am I suggesting its revival as art, but for the understanding of what is embedded within it as an idea. The whole process of contemplation and articulation of geometry, from its basic forms of square, circle and triangle to its complex multilayered configurations based on symmetry and seriality, produced not only a unique art form of its own making unprecedented in history; but, more significantly, it enshrined and revealed a rationality that produced Islamic civilisation with all its achievements in art, science and philosophy. The artistic form of geometry not only represents the ability of the mind to deal with complex problems of abstract nature, but its rationality demands that we look at things and understand them through the rationality of science, not only what is produced by others but what we can ourselves contribute to knowledge in our own way. The symmetry of geometry in Islamic art also offers,

Geometric brick design, dome interior, Shah Jehan Mosque, Thatta, Pakistan Photo credit: Benoit Florencon



in my understanding, an allegory for human equality (*Musawaat*); something that humanity now desperately needs. With this the Muslim world can now assert its own presence in the modern world, and thus offer the world a way to deal with its conflicts, violence and disharmony.

Although the geometry of Islamic art offers a worldview different from, and in opposition to, the West's dominant view of the world based on the genealogy of history which excludes Islamic civilisation from it, we must not reject all that which the West has produced. The West has in fact produced an enormous body of original ideas useful to humanity at large. And although these ideas primarily serve the interests of the system that has imposed itself on the world, this should not diminish their epistemological value. What is needed is not the wholesale acceptance or rejection of these ideas, but to develop one's own ability to scrutinize these ideas critically through a rationality that allows a dialogue

with the West on equal terms. Only then one can turn these ideas into a useful knowledge that recognizes the empiricism of historical facts against a myth of history that privileges the West only.

The creation of knowledge is fundamental for any progress in history. When there emerged a thrust for knowledge among the Arabs about fourteen hundred years ago, it was due to the human spirit, which wanted to move forward. If there is now a desire in the Muslim world to move forward, this movement can only occur through the rationality of knowledge, produced by its own spirit and imagination. What we now need again is another House of Wisdom, similar to what the Arabs had established in the 9th century in Baghdad.

This 'House of Wisdom' can in fact provide means for the Muslim world to overcome its endemic deprivation of knowledge, its ignorance and apathy, and put it on a path that would rejuvenate its energy and imagination in the modern world.<sup>12</sup> ●

## NOTES

1. Issam El-Said & Ayse Parman, *Geometric Concepts in Islamic Art*, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, London, 1976, p 1.

2. *Ibid*, p 1.

3. The use of geometry is also found in the earliest forms of art before its emergence in Islamic art - used even today in many cultures - but my concern here is with what is enshrined in the complex configurations of geometry as a rational system of abstract thought fundamental to Islamic philosophy.

4. I am aware of the achievements of other civilizations - such as Persian, Chinese, Indian, Maya, Aztec; also of many others in Africa, such as of Mali, Ghana and Zimbabwe. But my concern here is only with what emerged in the area surrounding the Mediterranean.

5. The recent interest of the global art world in the so-called new miniature painting, particularly produced by some young artists in/from Pakistan, is the re-assertion by the West its hegemonic ideology and its imposition on a Muslim country in the state of social turmoil and cultural confusion. The miniature painting has little to do with Islam, its spirit or worldview. It emerged in Iran, at the time of a decline in this spirit in the 14th century and an adoption by the ruling class of Iran of Chinese figurative painting to depict its own worldly life; it was then brought to India by the 2nd Mughul emperor Humayun and developed further by the emperor Akbar. However, the most important work in the miniature painting was not done under the patronage of the Mughals or Muslims, but in the Hindu states of Rajasthan and Sikh states of Punjab.

I am not here implying that picturing the world through living images is forbidden in Islam, but to look at the historical and ideological roots of picture-making. If picture-making in the Muslim world is a departure from the central spirit of Islam, a departure that no longer represents a return to idol worship but has become part of the everyday dynamic of life of the Muslim world, then it has to be understood through a rational discourse that reveals its historical complexity. Mere invoking one's identity, as a Pakistani for example, and to present and justify the recent development of miniature painting as representing authentic identity of a Muslim country is not only to reduce this complexity to a simple minded absurdity, but it denies the reality of the

Muslim world of the last few centuries when it had to struggle against the Western world in order to assert its own modern identity and self-determination.

6. This knowledge reached Baghdad as the philosophy of Neo-Platonism. Although rooted in the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, its centre was not in Athens but in Alexandria, Egypt.

7. See Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans Bernard Bosanquet, edited with an Introduction and Commentary by Michael Inwood, Penguin Books, London, 1993. It has been pointed out by Inwood that Hegel ignored Plato's views on Greek sculpture.

8. Enrique Dussel, 'Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity', in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds, *The Cultures of Globalization*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, USA, 1998, p 3.

9. *Ibid*, p 3.

10. It can be argued that the Western obsession with the human body, particularly its physical shape, is tantamount to a narcissism that has led to voyeurism and exhibitionism but also produced the violence of pornography that is now part of modern life, not only in the West but what has spread globally as part of Western culture.

11. Although the idea of World History is a Western philosophical construct, in which the West claims its centrality, it cannot be the responsibility of the West to recognise the rightful place of other cultures and civilizations in its genealogy. Although geometry is, in my view, central to Islamic philosophy, Muslim scholarship seems to have paid little attention to its role in the construction of history. Only when there is a scholarship that confronts the West's view of history, from which Islamic history is excluded, and puts forward an alternative view of history, the Muslim world can retrieve and recover what has been lost in the West's view of history.

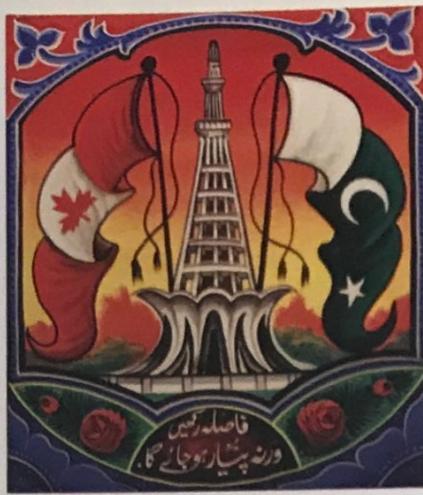
12. This new 'House' must comprise not only what is needed materially for a research work and its presentation but also invite and facilitate serious scholarship in pursuit not only of lost but new knowledge that can help humanity move forward in its march for a better future.

● RUMANA HUSAIN

# PASSION TO OBSESSION - ALI ADIL KHAN

Ali Adil Khan, art curator and Director at South Asian Gallery of Art (SAGA) in Toronto





Sadequain, *Artist and Muse*, pen on wax paper, 12.7 x 24.13 cm, 1970  
Photo credit: Faisal Anwar

The personal collection of Ali Adil Khan, curator and Director at South Asian Gallery of Art (SAGA) in Toronto, Canada started with "a passion for South Asian art, which quickly turned into an obsession".

**Rumana Husain in this e-interview communicated with the collector to learn about his collection and his engagement with artists whose works he collects.**

Ali Adil Khan's interest in collecting art started a decade after he moved to Canada in 1991. "Given that I arrived in Canada with my wife Shehla and a year-old daughter Mahnoor with \$500 borrowed money in my pocket, it took me 10 years before I could indulge in discretionary spending on art."

Prior to this he bought limited edition prints by local and nationally acclaimed Canadian artists such as Linda Sanderson and Robert Bateman. What began with his first major purchase of two Sadequain drawings from "*The Artist and the Muse Series*" (1970) from the collection of Wahab Jaffer in Toronto, led to his growing engagement with South Asian art as he accepted a position on the Board of the South Asian Visual Art Collective (SAVAC).

Khan's collection includes works by Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and Sri Lankan artists, which has primarily been shaped and influenced by his interaction with art critics and scholars, collectors, gallery owners as well as artists.

Collection of Paint Brushes





Red wall: Padmanabh Bendre, acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9 cm, 2005



Asif Ahmed, *Pahalwans*, gouache on wasli, 30.5 x 35.6 cm, 2009

**NuktaArt:** Did the SAGA gallery come about as a result of your interest in local and diasporic South Asian artists?

**Ali Adil Khan:** SAGA was born out of three key necessities: To promote emerging and established South Asian diasporic artists in Canada. At SAVAC, I had seen first-hand the struggle of South Asian artists to re-establish themselves in a new country. I truly believed at that time and now, that South Asian artists are second to none.

To acquire works, I had to travel to New York and London. There was no gallery in the Toronto-Montreal-Vancouver corridor that specialized in South Asian art. I wanted to fill this gap for selfish reasons.

The third was the need to develop a critical eye, appreciation and understanding by dealing in South Asian art. As I interacted with senior curators and institutional clients like Dr. Deepali Dewan of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and serious collectors like Kamran Anwar (London) and Durajoy Rehman (Dhaka), I strived to separate the mediocre from masterpieces, to understand important art movements and see the potential in emerging artists. This led me to visit art schools; the National College of Art in Lahore, the J.J. School of art in Mumbai, the



Casually displayed work in the basement

Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Dhaka and the Indus Valley School of Art in Karachi.

I have also learned tremendously from my studio visits where I spent time with important artists like M.F. Husain, Akbar Padamsee, Kibria, Laxma Goud, Thota Venkuntam, Tassaduq Sohail, Meher Afroz and Shahzia Sikander, among others.

**NuktaArt:** Do you buy art as an intuitive response to the work, or are you looking for certain mediums? Are there certain artists' narratives that you have followed and therefore acquired the works?

**Ali Adil Khan:** Acquisition and addition of works follow a structured and disciplined thought process. The streams I collect include modern and contemporary art (all mediums - including drawings, paintings, mixed media, sculpture, photography, ceramics), contemporary miniature art, calligraphy, pop art and etchings and prints.

I like to socialize with artists prior to acquiring their work, through which I get to know them and their art better. I also interact via email and social media with many artists, requesting them to send their new works.

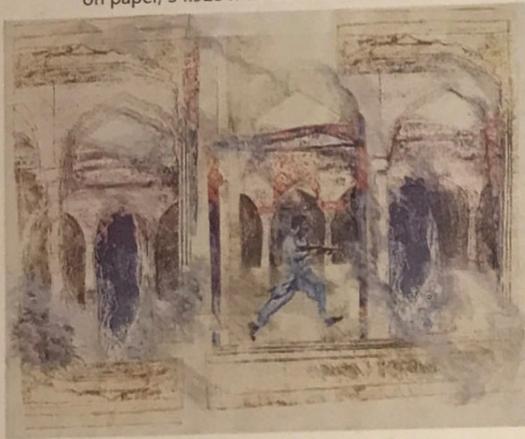


Talha Rathore, *It Took Away So Much*, gouache on wasli made from New York Subway Map, 29.21 x 34.29 cm, 2004

Noureen Rasheed, *Persian Old Man*, gouache on wasli, 30.5 x 34.29 cm, 2010



Naz Ikramullah, *A Continuing Anguish*, mixed media on paper, 34.925 x 42.545 cm, 1989



Samina Mansuri, *Drifter II (takhti)*, acrylic on wood, 33 x 22.9 cm, 2005



My modern and contemporary art collection is wide and includes important abstract works by Bangladeshi masters. This collection was started after my visit to the 12th Asian Art Biennale in Dhaka in 2010. Among the Indian artists, I also have works by R. Bendre, Youngo Verma, T. Venkuntam.

The contemporary miniature art collection includes works by Imran Qureshi, Talha Rathore, Nathulal Verma, Tazeen Qayyum, Sumaira Tazeen, Waseem Ahmed, Sylvat Aziz, Reeta Saeed to name a few. I am aware that there are a number of gaps in this collection that need to be filled.

My collection of etchings and limited edition prints include early works from plates by Rembrandt, and some British artists. Etchings and limited edition prints are by Anwar Jalal Shemza, Ustad Bashir Ahmed, Akbar Padamsee, Meher Afroz, M.F. Husain, Laxma Goud, Anupum Sud, Jogen Chowdhary, Naz Ikramullah, Paresh Maity and Jitin Das to name a few. These are some of the finest examples of printmakers from South Asia.

**NuktaArt:** As founder of the South Asian Gallery of Art, has your collection been built from works of artists you exhibited at the gallery?

**Ali Adil Khan:** Much of the works in my collection are from the exhibitions curated by me and often I become my own biggest customer and decide not to send them back to the artist and keep them for my own collection.



L to R:

Noureen Rasheed, *Copy of Padshahnama*, gouache on wasli, 20.3 x 30.5 cm, 2007

Nathulal Verma, *Dreaming*, gouache, gold on wasli, 101.6 x 127 cm, 2008

Noureen Rasheed, *Ali Adil Khan*, gouache on wasli, 30.5 x 40.6 cm, 2010

Moeen Faruqi, *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 76.2 cm, 2011

As an art dealer and collector, I am often faced with the challenge of putting my customers first and encouraging them to acquire the strongest works from the exhibition. Only when the strongest of the works from the show are not bought by clients, I will choose them for my personal collection. Some works are acquired directly from the artists during studios visits to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. A small number of the collection has been acquired from other galleries or art auction houses such as Christies (USA), Sothebys (UK) and Waddingtons (Canada).

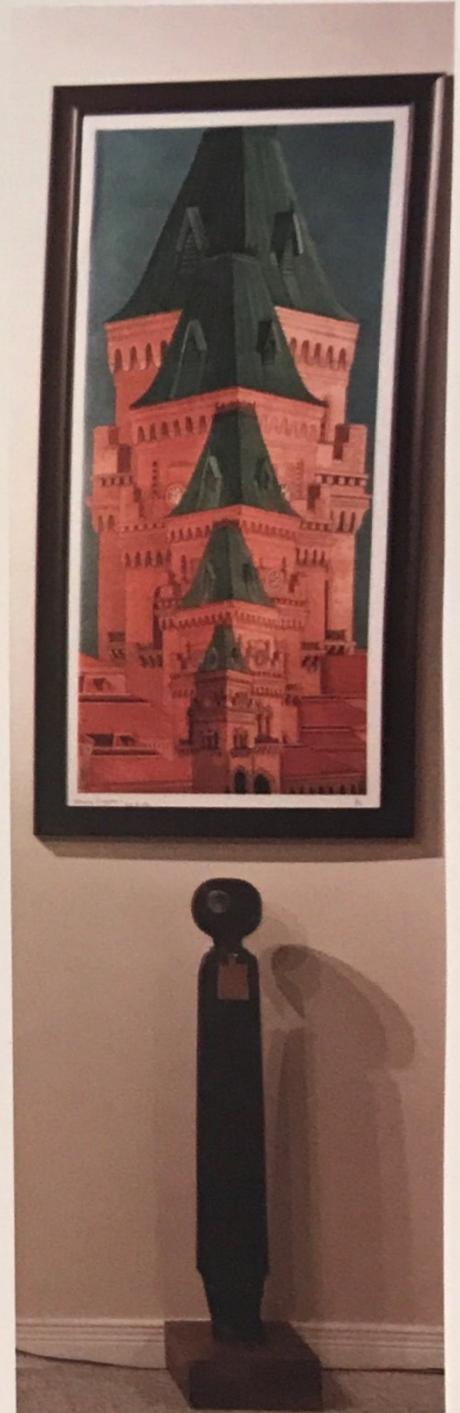
**NuktaArt:** Is the collection more focused on diasporic artists' works where you provide them a platform and visibility?

**Ali Adil Khan:** Being passionate about art, I love to support artists - be they a part of the diaspora or in their home country. When Tazeen Qayyum and Reeta Saeed first moved to Canada, I assisted in their transition by selling their works and acquiring them. I have about 6 - 8 works each by them, and some of these are from as early as those completed in their first year of training at NCA. I have also tried to acquire a piece from each of their major exhibitions.

I have supported Noureen Rasheed (who graduated in 2011) throughout her studies at the NCA. I commissioned and acquired 6 - 8 pieces to enable her to pay for her college fees. I have also advised and guided her during the course of the last four years. I first saw her works done while she was at the Naqsh School of Art in old Lahore, brought over by Syed Babar Ali Shah (who has established the Naqsh School) to Toronto. Her painting was a reproduction from the "Padshahnama" and had over 38 individually stylized portraits.

I am very fond of abstract and surrealistic works as I find them highly imaginative. I have a preference for figurative works. There are no landscapes in my collection as I do not find them inspiring.

My ceramic collection includes works by Sheherezade Alam and Ishrat Raza Suhrwardy from Pakistan. One ceramic piece was gifted to me by Nabahat Lotia during her visit to my home in 2008, and it is an important part of the collection. Very notable Canadian ceramic artists, like K.O. Young are also in my collection.



top to bottom:

Jimmy Engineer, Limited Edition Print, 61 x 76.2 cm, 2010

Abdul Jabbar Gull, wood sculpture, 20.3 x 61 cm, 2011

**NuktaArt:** You had co-curated a show of hand painted cinema posters and billboards of Bollywood cinema with Asma Arshad Mahmood. You also have a large personal collection of cinema posters. How did this come about and can you tell us about the films that most appealed to you?

**Ali Adil Khan:** I have collected over 100 vintage Bollywood posters by some prominent artists including Diwakar, Mohan, Bhosle, Kamble, Vasudeo, Manohar and others. Some from as early as 1940s, one such is of the film *Anmol Ghadi* from India starring the singer Noor Jahan, and a later version printed in Pakistan.

Three original gigantic billboards circa 1965, 1971 and 1991 acquired from Mumbai's famous "Chor Bazaar" (Thieves Market) also forms a part of this collection, and so does a rare poster from the film *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*, signed by Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan. There are some rare back-stage photographs of Bollywood stars from the 1960s and similar memorabilia.

My Bollywood section of the art collection is a part of my Pop(ular) art collection that includes Truck Art by Karachi artist Haider Ali and Rickshaw Art by Dhaka artist Ahmed. I recently loaned my Bollywood art collection to the Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD) in Calgary. The exhibition titled "Light, Camera, Action and Paint" received critical acclaim in Calgary. Let me share a note about it:

*"The Art of Bollywood was a tribute to the unique art practice that has evolved over the last 85 years in India. Hand painted billboards and posters for Indian Cinema have been created by three generations of talented artists, some of whom studied at India's best art schools while others apprenticed in studios from an early age. Many of these artists never gained the fame and recognition that embraced M.F. Husain, India's iconic artist, and largely remained as unsung heroes. This exhibition underlines the profound influence of Bollywood art on India's visual culture and its people. Artistic depiction of Bollywood actors as "larger than life" on posters and billboards has also resulted in unconsciously giving actors a super-human or godly status."*

I believe that Bollywood driven visual culture will continue in some form or fashion and this collection forms an important part of its history. A number of these posters are framed in museum quality framing and are stored away in rented storage space, while a few are hung in my basement. I foresee a Bollywood Museum in North America one day, and that is when I may decide to gift a part or all of my collection.



Ishrat Raza Suharwardy, *Untitled Raku* (ceramic), 10.16 x 266.7 cm, 2010



Shehrezade Alam, *Untitled* (ceramic), gold glazed and fired, 22.9 x 30.5 cm, 1999



Original Vintage Posters from Indian Cinema, lithograph on paper, 91.4 x 121.9 cm

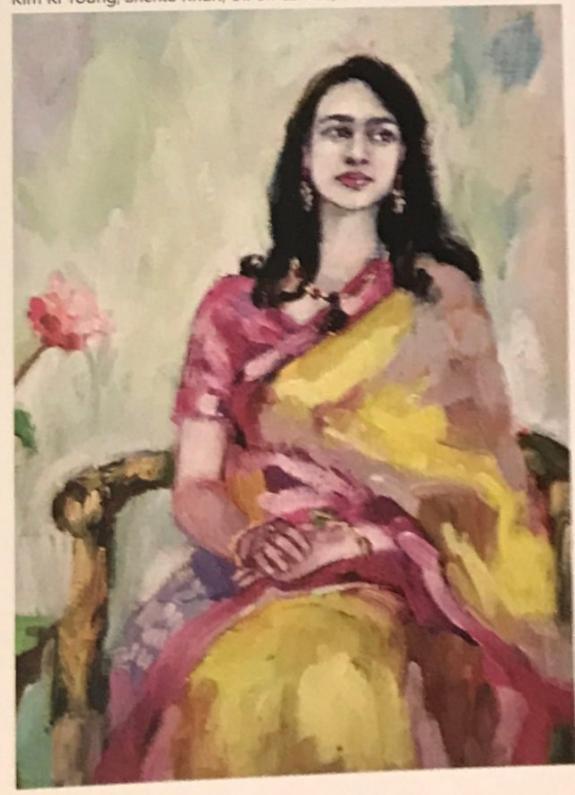
In future I would like to start a sixth stream of my collection and that would be photography. I have now run out of wall space in my home and paintings are stacked on the ground, in the basement and off-site storage.

I have over 300 pieces of art in my collection. There are about forty contemporary miniature paintings in my study (which I call the miniature room). The family room is called the Bangladesh room and it only has Bangladeshi artists' works. I am considering acquiring a Chughtai painting, which would have a special place in my collection.

I have two children and I want each of them to get the works after I am gone, so I have tried to buy paintings in pairs - whenever its possible. However, I may want to donate some pieces to a museum.

I consider a work of Gulgee very special as it has the artist's fingerprints in red paint on the frame. This happened when Gulgee framed it himself to protect it in transportation while it was still wet.

Kim Ki Young, Shehla Khan, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 40.6 cm, 2007





L to R:  
 Syed Iqbal, *Tears of Nature*, oil on wood, 61 x 61 cm, 2006  
 Ismail Gulgee, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 61



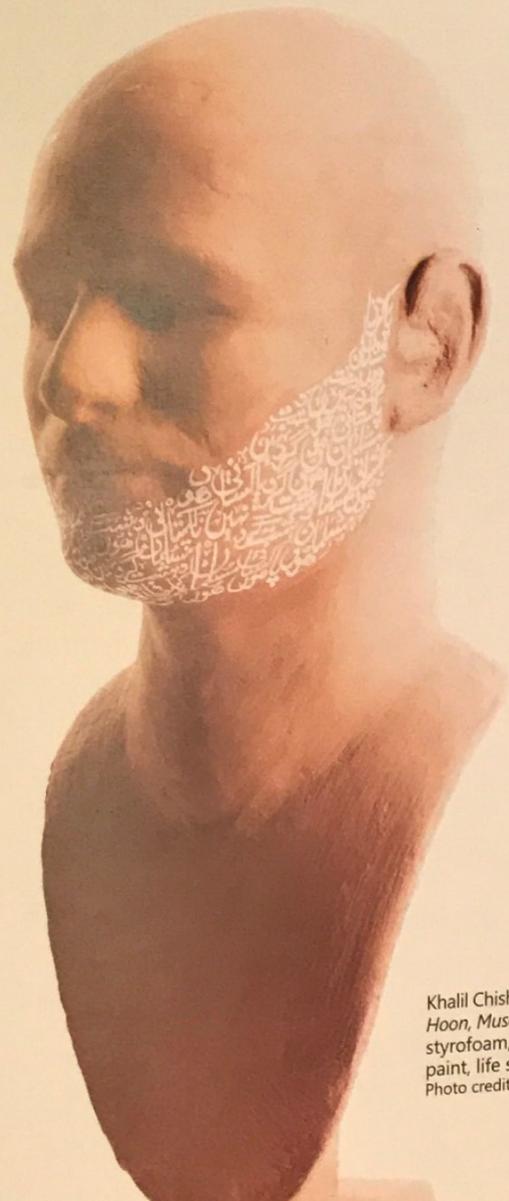
Mansaram, *The Palace Dancers*, Mansamedia, 43.2 x 34.29 cm, 2005

A similar passion is demonstrated in the way Ali Adil Khan has collected discarded artists' brushes to bring home some of the tools that create their art. According to him he had about fifty used paint brushes by some of the most well known South Asian artists (a few have passed away).

"I had made it a practice a few years ago to request the artist for one of their discarded brushes when I visited their studios or met with them. I would also ask them to sign the brush. These brushes include those of M.F. Husain, Kibria, Akbar Padamsee, Luxma Goud, Qayyum Chowdhary, Tassaduq Sohail, Meher Afroz, Athar Jamal, Shahid Rassam, Mahmudul Haque, and many more including contemporary miniature artists."

Ali Adil Khan spends hours with his collection over the weekends. He admits that admiring the intricacies of each piece and viewing these in different light - during the day and night - undoubtedly enriches his life, that of his family and visitors to his house. "Life would be so dull without all this art around me," he says.

Photo credit: Amin Rehman, unless stated otherwise.



Khalil Chishtee, "Pakistani Hoon, Musalmaan Hoon", styrofoam, aqua resin, paint, life size, 2013  
 Photo credit: Sibte Hasan

● AASIM AKHTAR



Artists at Inner Mangolia, Hebei Province, China

# CHINA RESIDENCY

Five Pakistani artists attended a workshop cum artists' residency program at Beijing, China, between 12 and 26 August, 2013, selected by the PNCA, Islamabad. The participating artists included **Akram Dost Baloch**, **Masood A Khan**, **Aqeel Solangi**, **Zaira Zaka**, and **Mobeen Ansari**. The artists worked at Jinhui Art School Space apart from visiting the Summer Palace in the Forbidden City, the Great Wall of China and Mangol in Hebei Province.

The exhibition of artworks produced during the residency were displayed at ESSE Space in 798 Art District, Beijing.

Below are excerpts from an e-interview conducted by **Aasim Akhtar** with **Aqeel Solangi (AS)**, **Zaira Zaka (ZZ)**, and **Mobin Ansari (MA)**

**AA: Why do you think art residencies matter?**

**AS:** Shifting art practices from studio space to 'another space' has become a norm in contemporary art. I personally think the experience helps in artist's intellectual growth, and sometimes the work takes a different direction resulting from that experience. Likewise, sharing space with an artist who has different visual and conceptual concerns and comes from a different cultural background can result in gaining insight.

For me art residencies are not just about working in a different environment for a fixed period of time; they are a journey from the personal meditative space to shared boundaries. As one moves from a familiar space

to an unfamiliar one and interacts with artists virtually unknown to him. Art becomes the only connecting thread.

Art residency programs often become an evolving educational source as, on most occasions, resident artists are expected to interact with the community or institute around. In the age of social media and the Internet, the importance of working together in a group has grown manifold. It can be compared to visiting a museum online with the experience of visiting a museum physically.

**ZZ:** Art residencies are important in that they provide to artists, from around the globe, the opportunity to work in a new environment away from the drudgery

of a routine life. They provide quality time and an inspiring space to work in solace. Meeting and working among artists of diverse cultural backgrounds also help imbibe new ideas and hatch new perspectives on art.

**MA:** Art transcends barriers. Not only do art residencies turn that aphorism into a reality, they also bridge gaps between cultures and help create awareness. They are like a cultural exchange. For instance, the residency in China helped me promote a better image of Pakistan not just through my medium but also through communication. In other words, the medium became the message.

**AA:** Art residencies are being looked upon as 'paid vacations' by some. Do you subscribe to this notion or do you beg to disagree? Why?

**AS:** Well, it depends on the nature of the residency program, and on what is already thought to be its

vacation.' Being an artist could be a passion for some but it's a profession for most, and not an easy one at that. In any case, the resident artist has to bear some expenses on his own - everything is not paid for.

**AA:** The residency in China opened a window on Chinese culture, art and society for you. What are your observations and experiences?

**AS:** The experience was mesmerizing, as we traveled from Beijing to the Bashang Prairie, and from the Metropolis to the plain hills and grasslands. From high-rise buildings to mud dwellings, it was a varied cultural landscape.

We were lucky to stay and work at Jinhui Art School situated in Beijing Songzhuang - an artists' colony - for five days. We were offered the opportunity to interact with the local artists in their studios. We stayed near 798 Art Zone upon our return to Beijing proper.

Shifting art practices from studio space to 'another space' has become a norm in contemporary art. I personally think the experience helps in artist's intellectual growth...

Artists at work in the Studio Space of Jin Hui Art School



outcome. If the hosts are satisfied (or expect) only ideas to be developed during a residency, then the selection committee is responsible for formulating groups of artists. In such a case, the artist is secondary.

**ZZ:** Sponsors almost always support Art residencies and other art initiatives, either partially or wholly. It all depends on the participants: whether the artists take it as an opportunity to work or simply as a 'paid vacation.'

**MA:** I disagree. By that definition, anyone (and not necessarily an artist) sent on assignment or for a meeting within the country or without should see it as a 'paid

Among the exhibitions that we saw during our stay, the most delightful was Shireen Neshat's 'The Book of Kings' at Faurshou Foundation in Beijing, and digital photography, installations and 3-D video animations by Tian Xiaolei at the Songzhuang Art Centre.

**ZZ:** Our Chinese counterparts engaged with us to the extent of becoming a 'second family' for us. They helped shape our concepts materialize into an exhibition. They were much enamored by art in Pakistan.

Our exhibition was accompanied by a short documentary on the residency/workshop activities with background vocals by folk singers from Pakistan.

**MA:** The art scene in China is vibrant and growing, and commands a huge support. We were much overwhelmed to see the artists' colonies, especially 798 Art District in Beijing. There were art galleries in every nook and cranny. Most of us enjoyed looking at the contemporary artwork, notably conceptual photography.

Majority of the people who we met could not speak English, yet we were welcomed wherever we went. We

**random and arbitrary. How did the group gel together, or why did it work in your favor?**

**AS:** I already knew all the fellow participants, and I was familiar with their practice but the experience of watching them work was incredible. We were all in different surroundings or art spaces that led each one of us to create a 'different' body of work. We produced more than thirty works in a wide range of styles, focusing in on our individual languages while utilizing new



Zaira Ahmad Zaka at work in Mangolia.

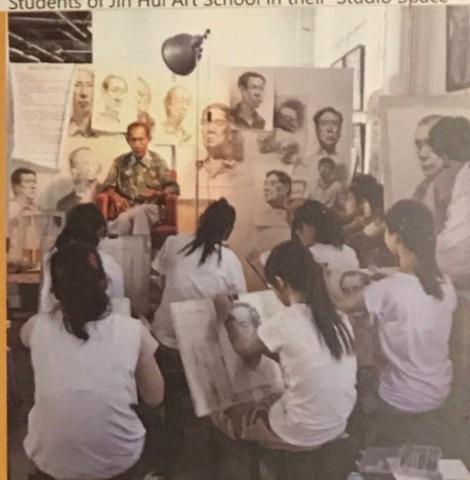
Masood A. Khan at work in studio space of Jin Hui Art School



Aqeel Solangi at work in studio space of Jin Hui Art School



Students of Jin Hui Art School in their 'Studio Space'



Meeting and working among artists of diverse cultural backgrounds also help imbibe new ideas and hatch new perspectives on art.

were shown a lot of respect and care, and we learnt a great deal about Chinese culture. Needless to say, we brought back with us lots of good memories.

**AA:** The selection of artists chosen to participate in this residency program appears to be rather

media. The most major excitement was to share ideas and help each other in understanding cultural symbols and signifiers that we encountered or gained exposure to during our travels from Beijing to Bashang.

**ZZ:** I am not aware of the criterion that led to the final selection of artists for this residency. The selection,

however, consisted of both senior and junior artists who connected well with each other, and presented a strong body of work to the Chinese. The PNCA considered it its most successful endeavor as the feedback from the Chinese officials and media confirmed. For me, it was a great professional experience - progressive and groundbreaking - that eventually led to exchanging ideas and sharing views.

**MA:** I think the selection was quite interesting because it featured five very different artists who worked in different media and told different stories: I was the youngest artist in the residency. Two of them were my teachers, and the last two were their teachers in turn. The selection worked in my favor because it gave me the chance to learn, once more, from my mentors while working in their company. It was almost like going back to the college!

**AA: How did work accomplished during the residency differ from your earlier practice back home? Was it a reconstruction/repetition of the old or did you reinvent yourself by beginning from scratch?**

**AS:** The change in environment and the experience of working in a space other than one's own studio was obviously a challenge, but a positive one at that. The work produced in China took on a different direction informed by a diverse imagery.

influences that the new cultural space had to offer right from the word 'go'. It was perhaps kind of a denial of preconceived notions but one can't escape from whatever one's been doing previously. So the work produced there was an amalgamation of earlier concerns and new findings. (My associate Zaira Zaka ended up calling my work 'Korean Finish' after a show of Realistic Korean painters at the Gozong Art Museum).

**ZZ:** At the residency, I had thought of working in printmaking techniques (woodcut, linocut, etching, etc.) initially, but once we were shifted to our studio space, I discovered a lot of empty canvases around. So I decided to prepare those canvases like calligraphy plates. I painted my canvases in grays, blacks and whites with collagraphic textures and handmade paper a la chin colle. Canvas allowed me the liberty to explore new techniques and toy with new concepts.

**MA:** We have more time at home, and are familiar with our materials. Sometimes, it may take a week or two to produce an art work because one works at one's leisure. In China, we had practically four days. The material was top of the line but took me time to get used to because I had ended up buying oil-based inks.

I think my work there was a mix of reconstruction and rediscovery; reconstruction in the sense that I had taken photographs in Pakistan that I merged with portraits taken in China to celebrate the diversity in the two cultures; and, rediscovery in terms of attempting



L to R:  
Opening ceremony of exhibition by Pakistani artists at ESSE Space, 798 Art District, Beijing

Visitors at the exhibition

I rendered images that had a cultural/historical perspective. Wherever we went, we encountered recurrent visuals that seeped into my work, such as the Deng Long, the Dragon and the Lotus, etc.

I was not expecting of myself to produce the kind of work I did because I was rather open to foreign

thumbprint painting medium that I had not indulged in since graduation.

**AA: What has been your contribution to this residency program? How do you think you've been**

**important to this residency or how do you justify your selection?**

**AS:** I produced three works in total at the residency: the Untitled ones done at Jinhui Art School were displayed at ESSE Space, and collected by the Ministry of Culture whereas the third one, done at Bashang Prairie was not displayed.

It was a great international exposure that will contribute enormously to my career. I tried my best to maintain decorum and respect the creative atmosphere, initiate dialogues with fellow artists and participate actively in exploring the Chinese traditions.

**ZZ:** Among the five chosen artists, I was the only female on the residency. While there, I utilized the opportunity of exercising my potential and experience as an artist to the fullest.

Back home, I run Zaira Zaka Studio Space - an initiative that invites both international and local artists, once a year, to produce and showcase their work in Pakistan and abroad. I learnt a lot about how the Chinese run the program, and used my expertise in organizing our group through regular discussions. In addition to supporting the group, I documented the workshop, prepared the inaugural speech, wrote a report and encouraged everyone towards ameliorating Pakistan's international image.

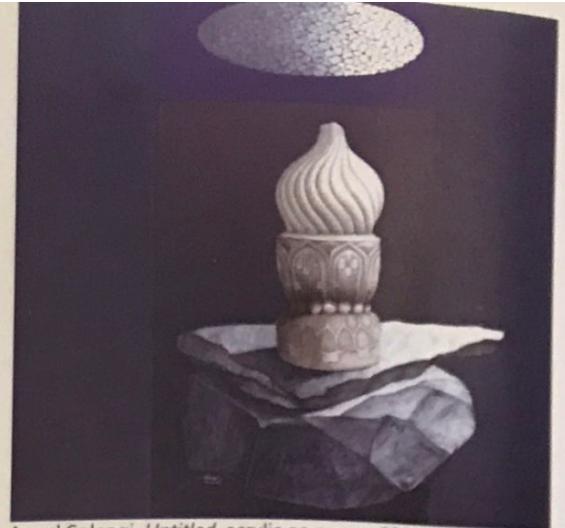
**MA:** I think I made a contribution through photography, and by disseminating information about Pakistan through interaction with the local population. I shared with them portraits of 'unsung heroes' and spoke about them to shed light on Pakistan. At the end of the day, each one of us contributed in his/her own way to make the experience a success.

*The artists acknowledged the support of Mr Xiang, Mr River Jiang, Ms Xu Wei, Ms Concrete and Mr Kevin in China, and Ms Musarrat Nahid Imam at the PNCA, and the Minister of Information, Mr Pervaiz Rashid. Pakistan's Ambassador to China, Mr Masood Khalid and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Heritage, Mr Mashood Ahmed Mirza who were instrumental in making this cultural exchange possible.*

...In China, we had practically four days. The material was top of the line but took me time to get used to...



Zaira Ahmad Zaka, *Untitled*, acrylic and collage on canvas, 2013



Aqeel Solangi, *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm, 2013



Mobeen Ansari, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm, 2013



Masood A. Khan, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm, 2013



Akram Dost Baloch, mixed media, 2013 (detail)